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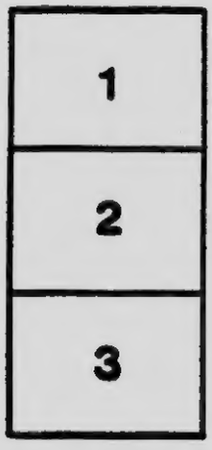
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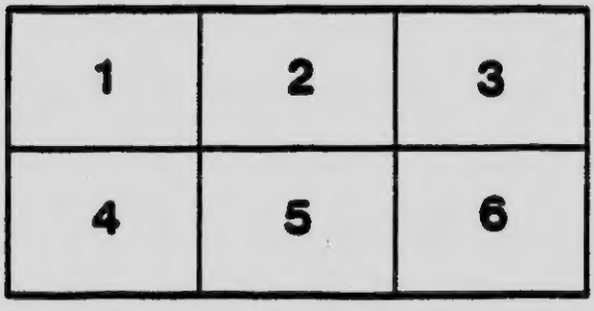
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Can. Fraser. Williams C.
Thanksgiving

To Edwin, also Eds:
John a. Cousins
from their auntie,
W. A. Fraser

THE LONE FURROW

THE LONE FURROW

BY

W. A. FRASER

AUTHOR OF
"THIRTEEN MEN," "THOROUGHBREDS,"
"MOOSWA," ETC.



D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK
1907

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Published February, 1907

DEDICATED TO

"THE GREAT WHITE BEAR"

FOREWORD

THE Lady-who-knows was telling me of the four great men who had trailed their signatures up and down this continent in huge enduring letters of steel and masonry and mental monuments; and, after a time, I asked: "But who is the *one* great man—four are confusing?"

She smiled whimsically, and smoothed the folds of her plain dress thoughtfully for a minute. Then she asked, "Are you fond of child stories?"

"Yes," I answered; "but what has that to do with the great point at issue?"

With a prelude of the whimsical smile she related this little narrative:

"Once upon a time I was visiting in the home of one of these 'Big Four' men. Another visitor was there with a little baby. I think she did not know a great deal about babies.

"One night I was wakened by the plaintive wailing of the little one whom I knew had been left to be cared for by the nurse. After a time—it must have been nearly an hour—the shrill little voice was stilled, and I was just dropping off to sleep when sister Barbara came to my room, touched me on the arm, and beckoned me with forefinger, and in silence, to rise and follow her.

"Very gently she opened the door a little; and, peeping

through the crack, I saw, prowling up and down the dim-lighted corridor, a huge white bear.

"Presently the bear became metamorphosed, by the nearer view, into our host, the one corner of the 'Big Four,' clad in his white nightshirt, in his arms the little baby sucking in happy content from a feeding bottle of warm milk.

"As we watc' ed—I think there was a tear of appreciation blurring my sight—the little one fell asleep; then it was given back to the nurse, the white bear, grumbling as bears do, lumbered back to his den, and Barbara, saying: 'Wasn't it beautiful! I wonder where in the world he got that milk heated—he must have gone all the way down to the kitchen for it,' slipped through the door of her room, and I fell asleep, glad that I had seen the generally hidden gentleness of a great man."

"It *was* beautiful," I said to the Lady-who-knows. "I have written a book with a baby and a strong man in it, and I am going to dedicate it to the man of huge affairs who had pity in his heart for a babe, and the wisdom to alleviate the little one's needs."

"You don't know his name, so you can't get his permission," the Lady-who-knows objected.

"I will just dedicate it to the 'Great White Bear,'" I answered insistently, "then nobody will know, only you and I, and he can't object."

CHAPTER I

THIS chronicle of the simple life at Lilac Hedge would be like offering in barter a web of homespun if it were not for the story of a woman's pathetic wait which runs through it like a thread of burnt gold, and the mystery that shrouded Minister Neil Munro's life.

For years the house had held its brick-red cheek defiantly to the village street, with just a curious old picket fence separating the two.

When the Memsahib planted the spindly withes of lilac, they seemed so hopelessly attenuated for a possible barrier that I viewed her efforts with silent ridicule; but now the hedge rests its elbows on the picket fence in summer holding aloft a purple curtain behind which we rehearse our simple drama of life, shielded from the critical audience of the village.

Our tent is pitched in the land beautiful—a sentient beauty that is not alone optical; a kindly fate is the real architect of our happy environment. The purple-red blossom clusters of the hedge, like feathered plumes, nod contentedly to the graystone church that cuts its sharp gable up to the place of stars just across the earth road we call a

street. Sometimes the church is just a blur against the Rembrandt background of darkened night; and sometimes, in the enlarging moonlight, it looms cathedral-like. One night out of seven its stained-glass window shows a sacred group bathed in a flood of yellow light; star-led, sturdy shepherds gaze upon the infant Christ that nestles in the Madonna's arms. Just glass, blue and red, and figures born of faltering art, and yet it stood a beacon light to a storm-tossed soul striving in the waters of bitterness, wandering blindly through the Valley of Achor.

From within the thick stone walls a many-throated organ, leisurely, sonorous, making little of our pin pricks, thrusts its rich melody across our hedge, and then we forget.

On our right hand dwells "Grandma Murdoch"—"Grandma" in the consanguinity of our friendship, and the altitude of years that pyramid upward from the young life of our children to Grandma's three-score. In her eyes we stand deified as the authors of the little ones she adores; a curious reflex claim we have upon her fostering regard. The children go to her lawn and prattle like the fussy second hand on a dignified clock; and Grandma figuratively strikes the hour—a rich word of wisdom or of approval now and then.

Some curious leagues of unexplored mental territory lie between us elders, for we seldom take the long journey of its traversing, to come together in one another's holding. Once in a great while one of the children may fall ill; then indeed Grandma comes the many leagues of a dozen yards to ask how the little one is faring, bearing gifts of flowers, or a jelly, or a cooling black-currant drink.

On our left dwell people lovable in their content of dis-

tant friendship. And just beyond them lives the Agnostic, ever ready to wander erratically up the walk to our lawn, possessed of an insatiate desire to solve the Why and How and When, and rearrange the This and That of the universe.

This monochromatic life, frictionless, smooth gliding, should have endured like a well-placed glacier; but it is in just such placid fields that meteoric rocks fall; and one day in June the beginning of a Something began.

In the deceitfully quiet prelude of it, I had my trout rod in hand, waiting for Laddie, who, down by the stable, was ruthlessly upturning to the disquieting light, pink-red spirals of coral that were earthworms.

I heard a quick, nervous step on the board sidewalk which I knew heralded the approach of Teacher Ruth Harkett. She flustered through the hedge opening, clattering the gate with nervous indecision; on the smooth, quaint, ivory-toned face, crested by bronze-gray hair, was acute distress.

Something had gone wrong in the church, I noted mentally. It was not the hour for Doo-doo's music; neither was it the set time for French; and as the little woman took interest in nothing but the church, outside of these things, I knew the wrinkled brow was caused by the huge graystone structure across the way.

"Such trouble!" she panted.

"Is it the organ again?" I asked.

"No, not the organ."

She did not confide in me; and I felt that it was something not for the crude handicraft of man, so I said, "The Memsahib is about somewhere."

Teacher slipped through the door like a frightened mouse, all in nervous haste; and, just as Laddie and I passed to the sidewalk, she and the Memsahib came out, the latter's face mirroring the visitor's anxiety, as she said: "Don't stay too late, please; we may need you."

Laddie and I swung down the country road, two children—I youthed to blitheness by the rejuvenating tingle of the quivering rod in my fingers. The air was an atmospheric blanket of vaporous warmth. I cried aloud in joy when a raindrop spatted against my nose.

"The trout will be crazy to feed," I said to Laddie.

"I bet we'll catch a whole lot of fish, Father," he answered.

We had just topped the long hill that curved away to a gentle valley that cradled in its lap a brook loitering like a laggard schoolboy after a mad scrambling race to escape from the clutch of some Genii hidden in the pine wood that was an emerald wedge driven between the hills away to our right.

We ran down the clay road, too careless to quarrel with claiming gravity. The loose-jointed wooden bridge drooped its shoulders as if its thirty years of bearing countless loads of golden grain had broken its spirit; but its rail, purple-gray, shone like a necklace of pearls in the ripple of amethyst waters beneath. Little singing brook voices came up through the chinks of the planks as we clattered across in restless haste; and where we climbed the rail fence to a meadow that nursed millions of sapphire violets, was a jarring note of man's inhumanity to man; it read:

FISHING STRICTLY PROHIBITED.
TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED.

DONALD MACKAY.

With the point of my rod I tickled Donald MacKay in the ribs; rubbed its brass nose across his notice in derision. Little we stood in awe of the MacKay. Was he not our postmaster, and a Tory, with the opposite party, the Liberals, in power? Donald, holding his office by toleration, might quarrel with no man. His writing on the wall was a dead letter—killed by the insistence of the village nomads that they would cast a fly wherever the speckled beauties swam.

Then I headed for the Skipper's pool and flicked its purple breast with flies of alluring garb; my Brown Hackle, my Silver Doctor—all of the lying decoys I tried in vain.

Suddenly I saw a look of anxiety on Laddie's face; but before I could ask the reason I was answered from behind my back.

"Aye, friend, an' hoo do ye like my fishin'?"

It was MacKay's voice.

"I don't think much of it," I answered, somewhat ungraciously; "I've lost two flies and a good cast on a root in the stream, and haven't had a rise."

"I'm feared the brook's fished oot. I think I'll just tak' doon yon notice; it's too much o' an attraction tae fishermen."

"I was going to ask you for leave, MacKay, as soon as I got home," I said apologetically. "I thought perhaps

I'd enrich my request with a couple of trout for your supper, then."

"Ah, ye needn't trouble. I dinna mind your fishing—I've told you that before. But I mortal dislike the way Willie Angus has o' doin'. He gets the loan of my rod to fish my own preserves, and half the time he doesn't bring it back at all—I have tae send for it. I'll just hae a pipe an' go back."

We lighted up together, while Laddie, encouraged by the Scot's peaceful tone, threaded one of the live coral things to the curve of his hook.

"Ha'e they any news o' the Minister?" MacKay asked, running a stalk of dry grass through the stem of his pipe.

"What minister do you mean, MacKay?"

"I didna know there was more than one in the village," he answered.

I understood. MacKay meant the guardian of the Scotch Kirk; the Methodist parson, and the Baptist, and all the others were, according to the Calvinist, just not ministers at all.

"What's wrong with him?" I asked.

"He's away—did you no' hear it? He disappeared yesterday—vanished, like the spirits o' Tam O'Shanter."

Now I understood why Teacher had come for the Memsahib with a world of trouble in her sweet, patient face.

"Perhaps he's just gone for a visit," I hazarded.

"Not at all. He just left the poor lady, his wee wifie, expectin' him home tae breakfast, an' she's waitin' yet. They saw him at the station, some say. It's altogether most extraordinare. I'm thinkin' he was daffy of late."

"He worked too hard," I said; "the church at Kintyre was too much. Two sermons in the kirk, and a drive of eight miles to Kintyre, with another sermon, all in one day, was too much for any man."

"He was a weakling. I'm no sure but there might be something back o' it all—something to smudge the good name o' the Kirk."

"He was too enthusiastic," I contended—"too conscientious. He was giving his life for a lot of pagans!" MacKay's insinuation angered me; for more than once, wearied beyond count by the seeming hopelessness of his fight for tangible progression, the Minister had sat in my study where there was the open grate, the kindness of pictures, and the smell of books, and under this influence had allowed his soul to leak out a little; therefore I knew that what MacKay said, or hinted at, was a lie.

"Aye, he was a busy body; but I've seen many a clatterin' horse that wouldna' get over the ground fast. He was revolutionary, if you ken what I mean."

"I don't."

"Well, he was new-fangled; he was like a pea on a hot griddle. I'm thinkin' he took more stock in the organ an' the singin' than he did in profound theology. I dinna care to see a minister o' the Gospel wearin' a mustache—it's no pleasant to my ears to hear the word o' God whistlin' thro' hair. An' speakin' o' whistlin', once I walked home from prayer meetin' with him, an' he just kept up a snivel of whistle as though we'd been at a nigger show. I didn't like it over-well—it was no respectful to the solemnity of the occasion."

MacKay was cut short in his harangue by a yell from

Laddie. I saw the boy spring to his feet; and something of strength was bending his short birch rod almost double, and the line was cutting through the water with a hissing swish.

"God, man! he haes him—he's hooked the Skipper!" yelled MacKay, scrambling up. "Play him a little, Mannie—play him! Gie him the butt!" the Scot commanded, forgetting the nature of the boy's tackle.

"Stick to him, Laddie!" I admonished.

My fingers tingled to handle the birch rod, but sport forbade. Laddie had hooked the Skipper—into the hands of babes he had been delivered—and all we could do was advise.

"He'll break the line! Ease him doon, Laddie, ease him doon. Dinna haul on him!"

MacKay's serenity was deeply ruffled—he was interested. He raced up and down the bank of the pool like a water spaniel; he jumped into the air.

"Lord! for a landin' net—for a scoop!" he ejaculated. "Let him bide now, Laddie, let him bide—dinna yank on him."

Deep down under a big root the Skipper was sulking.

"Rest yoursel', Laddie—dinna get excited, boy." And the giver of this advice of calmness was prancing up and down like a war horse. Then off came the MacKay's coat; he rolled up his sleeves and threw himself on his stomach, saying: "Hold my legs, man! I'm goin' to run a hand far doon to see if I can gill him wi' my fingers—it's fair enough. Dinna tickle him, Laddie; just soothe him, like."

"Be careful, man," I said, for MacKay, stretching down

along the line till his chin was in the water, was hard to hold on the slippery bank.

I think Laddie must have "tickled" the Skipper, for he came from his purple lair with a rush. I hardly know just how it happened, but the MacKay's legs slipped from my grasp, and in he went.

Perhaps it was the appearance of the red-headed Scot in his pool that disgusted the Skipper; at any rate he whirled and came down stream, the line singing with his speed.

"To the bar—give him a lead down to the shallows, Laddie!" I yelled, excitement blinding my eyes to the predicament of the MacKay; in fact, the Scot had practically disappeared from off the face of the earth. But now, even as I clutched at the boy's arm, leading him down bank, the birch rod quivered and bowed with a new pressure, the line held rigid, the running water throwing a gray feather of spray from its quivering cord.

Before he could check again, Laddie had him in the shallow waters of the gravel bar below, where he was quite helpless.

I confess that in my excitement I rushed to the salvage of the trout, leaving the MacKay to his own devices. In among the slippery stones I floundered, and, thrusting my thumb in the speckled monarch's gills, lifted him from the waters.

"Ha'e you got him, man?" I heard; and there was the dripping red head of the Scot showing above the bank of the pool.

"Are you all right, MacKay?"

"I had na thought of a bath to-day," said MacKay,

clambering out. "But I'm not mindin' it a bit, seein' as we've landed, between us, yon trout."

He had the fish in his grasp now, caressing him like a loved child.

"Three poun', if he's an ounce," MacKay judged, making a scales of his hands. "I'm powerful wet, though," and he whipped off his breeks and wrung them out.

"It's an odd turn this, MacKay," I said; "every man-jack in the village has been after the Skipper for three years, and now Laddie catches him with a schoolboy's tackle."

"Aye; Fate often throws the best cut to fools or children. I hooked the Skipper once mysel', but he took my cast, broke it as though it was a thread—I'll swear this is the hook in his maw now."

True enough, the old warrior of the pool wore three fly-hooks in his upper lip, as a Rameses might have sported scarabæ, and his sides were scarred from combat with bulls of his own kind. He was the finest brook trout I had ever seen; but, also, there was the bitter thought that I, scientific angler, had failed in the taking of this prize, and that ten-year-old Laddie had put shame upon me.

Then we wrapped the king trout in a royal robe, purple and fine linen, the clear cool grass of the meadow, entombed him in my creel, and with pride in our hearts we swung back to the village.

Just as we came to the roadway, MacKay wrote on the prohibitory notice, with a pencil:

"The Skipper was caught this date, 27th of June, 1906."

"I'm thinkin' that'll do more for keepin' the meadow from bein' tramped to death than the notice itself," he said.

As the Memsahib came to the wicket in the hedge I, blinded by the triumph of having been in at the death, said: "Laddie caught the Skipper; look—isn't he a beauty!"

"Hush—sh!" she whispered, and motioned with her hand toward my study.

MacKay must have seen the movement, for without a word he departed.

"You've heard about the Minister?" the Memsahib asked.

I nodded.

"I've brought the poor wifie home."

The Memsahib put her hand on my arm, and with pleading in her gray eyes continued: "You won't mind? She would have gone mad all alone there in the house."

That way was the coming of Jean Munro; as she said herself, in a woman's faith, just for a few days until her husband returned.

The Memsahib explained that there was nothing for me to do in the matter, as the Reeve of the village and the deacons of the Kirk had taken active measures for his finding; just that the wife was to be with us as in a haven of consolation and cheer.

"She has got to be with friends; she's not fit to be left alone," the Memsahib said. The full significance of her words was lost upon me at the time, as I remembered, when I came to know of Jean's baby—a babe that was to prove stronger than men and women.

That afternoon Iona was divided, agitated by the two new, great interests—the disappearance of Minister, and the

taking of the Skipper. The feeling of accepted calamity in regard to Minister Munro's disappearance had obtained rapidly now; Minister had been gone but two days—might he not be away just for a rest? But then Jean must know something of bad import over his going, for it was her apprehension that permeated our nerves.

I thought of the weird address the Minister had given his congregation the very last Sabbath preceding his disappearance. He had been like one possessed of a haunting memory of some black chapter in the past. It appealed to me as if he were speaking out of his memory—at times his declamatory vehemence had caused me to study his face for signs of mental disorder. He reviled the drink demon as though it were an embodied ogre standing in front of him. In fact, I saw MacKay and some of the stanch Presbyterians, sitting in front pews, squirming under his castigation.

Full of this remembrance I went to the Memsahib and spoke of it. It was a new light. Munro perhaps had become deranged through overwork, and might have committed suicide. But she would not believe it likely that Minister had done such a wicked thing, holding that he was perhaps ill somewhere, and that we should hear from him in a day or so.

The children crept about the house silently, like mice, instinctively knowing that Dread had stolen in with the shadows of evening, and would perch upon the pillow of some sleeper in our household. When the subtle change from gray to shadow had ceased, and it was dark, they came to say good night.

Always this was an observance of unbridled liberty. I,

the stern parent of the daytime, becoming a stalking horse for the unloading of remnants of frivolity. My ears nature had set on at an angle that they might be the more easily pinched or pulled, and the top of my pate, the smooth patch, inviting childish criticism; the good-night kiss itself, sometimes seven-limbed like Kali, or a prefunctory dab at my mustache, followed by a grimace of distaste.

But this night subdued tenderness suggested that they had aged to sympathetic wisdom. All but Laddie, who, being a boy, whispered in my ear: "Wasn't he a whopper, Father?"

There it was again—Skipper claiming interest. But I noticed that Laddie kissed the pale cheek of our guest as tenderly as did his sisters.

The Memsahib came down from putting the children to bed, and we went out to the lawn, where the sky was brought close by myriad stars. The Memsahib and Jean sat apart from me, and I knew their hands were clasped.

Perhaps these things had made me selfish. There was a suggested change that hardened me. My side of the hedge had held all this that was a catering to satisfaction, to happiness; driving my pen had been sufficient to me. That each dwelling, up and down the street, held its own tragedy of drink, or of poverty, or of death, or of worse, was to me nebulous knowledge, concrete to those with whom it had to do. Even the church across the way, majestic, dominant, meant but a place of irregular entry, except to the Memsahib and the children; now it had leaped the hedge—its heart throbbed on my lawn.

Soon I heard the nervous step of Teacher Ruth; it irritated me.

She turned in at the gate.

"There's no word of Minister yet, God guard him!" she whispered to me; and then went over to the two who were sitting in silence, waiting. And there I am sure she told an optimistic lie of charitableness—a weak invention, a tale of hope; thinking to help Jean to a little sleep that night.

My mental disquietude was strangely at variance with the silence of the evening. The air was like an irritating void, receptive, vibratory to the least friction of noise. Down where the pond cradled in the valley's lap, the piping voices of young frogs rose upon the stillness and floated up to us—tiny trebles of complaint they seemed.

Suddenly the strum of a banjo picked by irresolute fingers pushed waveringly down the street and over the hedge. Then a sweet tenor voice—so sweet, so familiar, that I knew Jean would shiver in misery—mingled with the drone of the banjo. It was Jean's brother, Robert Craig, who sang "Home they brought her warrior dead." And what was the strange fatality that wedded his sweet tenor to the words that were like the drip of blood from the fingers of Mamselle Guillotine!

> "Home they brought her warrior dead;
> She nor swooned nor uttered cry;
> All her maidens, watching, said,
> 'She must weep or she will die.'"

How clearly the knife thrust through the night air from the open window of the tavern, just beyond Grandma's house—but a stone's throw from where we sat.

When the singer's voice hushed at the end of the sec-

ond verse I almost welcomed the mad carnage of rabble voices that followed.

"The Lacrosse boys!" Teacher said, in deprecation; "they beat the team from Kintyre to-day, and are having a little supper."

I knew what that meant—I'm afraid Jean did. Robert's exquisite voice was a curse to him. Always in the village it brought him within the lure of his inherited bondmaster—drink. Like an echo of my thoughts came the united bellow of many, inharmoniously declaring that:

"There'll be a hot time in the old town to-night!"

Their laughter mocked the silent misery that was over our little group. Somebody had mercifully closed the window; perhaps the revelers had gone from that room, for presently the hilarious noises ceased, and I could hear the three women talking intermittently in low tones. Tacitly we all had determined to sit late into the night; I think we all dreaded the wakeful pillow—I, even, feeling too morbid for my work in the study.

It must have been close to midnight when I heard the irregular tramp of erratic feet on the sidewalk. The darkness held indistinctly the forms of two men coming our way, with some jangling element of discord in their speech.

The treacherous light of the open doorway betrayed me, silhouetting my form against its bright background, and I saw through the gate cleft in the hedge, the leering face of Robert, as he called mockingly: "Hello, Professor Munchausen! You ought to be in bed—hic! 's no good burning midnight oil, you know!"

I darted to the gate, through it, and whispered: "Your

sister is in here, Robert—for God's sake go home, boy; Jean's in sore trouble!"

My appeal shamed the boy—sobered him.

"Sorry, Doctor—awf'ly sorry!" he said, repentantly. "Poor Jean! Munro's a sweep——!"

"Hush-h-h!" I admonished. "Go, Robert; come and see your sister to-morrow—do, please do."

The boy seemed to understand, for he said: "I wanted to see Jean bad to-night—I wanted to tell her something 'bout that sweep. I'll come to-morrow. Good night, Doc."

I walked home with Teacher and we talked about this dominant, simple going away of one man that seemed destined to enshadow our lives. It was really the absence of known reason for Minister's going, the paucity of clew that, to my mind, made it difficult to trace him, or to console Jean. "What do they say?" I asked.

"Horrible insinuations chiefly—they drag in Malcolm Bain's name."

"Malcolm Bain! Good heavens!"

She nodded. "You see, Dr. Cameron, their hinting at a thing like that proves that they don't know the real reason, whatever it is. Perhaps it's just the mysterious ways of Providence," she continued with pious introspection. "It may be that Minister was called upon to sacrifice himself to wake up the sleepers—to rouse fresh interest in church matters."

Here was a curious example of centralized thought. To the little woman, her mind running in somewhat narrowed grooves, it was more of a structural edifice, the shrine, God's tabernacle wherein his worshipers foregathered, that appealed to her as a saving power, rather than the intense

earnestness of an individual like Neil Munro. Her tones suggested that she would almost view with equanimity his immolation if it tended to a betterment of church influence.

"I don't understand," I declared.

"Well, Minister was never the same after his years of labor in the Indian field. I knew him before he went there. At that time he was a theologian, and, think as we may, it's theology, ponderous theology that holds the Presbyterians together. Dullness may try them a bit, but they're a patient stock, and dullness is never dangerous. If they have nothing to quarrel about they can't split up into factions, and they're prone to take sides. There never was a less gifted man than George Douglas, and he shepherded this flock for fifteen years, with never a lost sheep."

Again Teacher's point of view, which was an absolute mirroring of Kirk philosophy, that so long as a man sat in the shadow of the Church he was not a lost sheep, no matter what dearth of Godliness was in him.

"But surely Minister Munro was all for the betterment of his people," I expostulated.

"He meant to be—in fact, he was overzealous. Something came over him in that pagan land, India. Haven't you noticed his sermons? Perhaps *you* wouldn't have, though"—this was an unconscious reflection upon my supposed lack of interest, I took it. "I mean," Teacher continued, "that he appeared to be giving us his own convictions and interpretations of God's ordinations."

"But wasn't that what he was for—a spiritual leader?"

"No, not at all. He would have achieved more as a spiritually inspired interpreter of the Law; more of the Bible, of God as pictured in God's Word, that is what a minister

should be. There *was* something wrong"—she said this with an insistent rising inflection in her voice—"Minister's sermon last Sabbath was horrible. Not to me, perhaps," she added reflectively, "for I could see in his eyes that his soul was in anguish, and I was full of sympathy, but it was reactionary—it widened the breach in the Church. I just went home and prayed for the man."

"You should have prayed for the congregation," I said crossly. "They want a sermon of incense, an unctuous anointment, not the wrath of the righteous."

"But if he were in the right," she questioned, "why did the Lord call upon him to depart like this?"

I was dumfounded. What an extraordinarily uncharitable thing was this form of religion that should have been all charitableness! And from Teacher, too, a woman I had looked upon as the most gentle creature in the world! Just blind she was, seeing nothing but the material welfare of formalism.

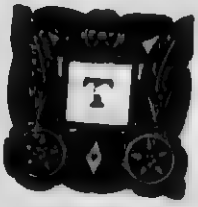
"I'm sorry you take this view of it," I said. "Minister and Jean will need all their friends in this hour of trial."

This appeal acted upon Teacher as though she had suddenly been transformed into another person. We were standing at the gate of Teacher's little home; her head drooped on one of the square-topped gate posts, and she sobbed bitterly.

"You had better go in," I said, "you'll catch cold."

I walked back pondering over that curious thing character, that like a weather vane holds straight into the teeth of the bitter gale, and sways and turns foolishly in an idle summer breeze.

CHAPTER II



HAT day I belied my intent to hold aloof from all that was not my business by stirring up the Elders, and penning the personals that were to go forth to the papers. I was wishing that Malcolm Bain would come to the Hedge for a talk over the mystery.

The Memsahib had said Malcolm would come, for he was a gaunt Scottish Don Quixote, tilting at the windmills of sorrow, and with a strong unbreakable spear always couched in the battles of the weak.

Malcolm's father, old Hugh Bain, had tilled the strong clay soil of four goodly farms with such thrifty vehemence that when he died there was an ample sufficiency for the son.

Among other antique flitches of the Highland sentiment Bain the elder had brought from Scotland was a desire to have a son in the ministry. "Just a grand thought, man!" And so Malcolm had been sped along this high trajectory which carried him to a fair altitude in a collegiate way, and then, all at once, and to the aspiring father's intense chagrin, Malcolm just dropped back to earth into a peculiar mundane rut of his own fashioning.

When the father died the son leased the farms, and devoted his energies to the vocation that he thought suited him best, and which the villagers declared was no vocation at all, "Just a shilly-shallying wi' life."

Physically Malcolm was almost a giant in stature, and absolutely so in strength. The physical strength was apparent in the huge chest, the straight massive neck, and the arms that corded muscle caused to hang in an ellipse at his side as he walked; they were like the curved sides of a parenthesis enclosing the story of his physical abundance.

These things of exterior predominance Bain could not hide, but his diffident reserve was a wall that had preserved his mental force, to me, as to the others, a *terra incognita*. It was only later through our endeavor to find the missing minister that I found way through this barricade, to revel in the abundant richness of Bain's beautiful mind. At this time he was seemingly engrossed in an arduous supervision of the church and the weather. Areas of low pressure, and waves of heat and cold he held at the tips of his huge fingers; and in the Kirk, burning questions, large and small, followed the tortuous course upward from the congregation and through the elders to the pinnacle of his wise arbitration.

Once the Memsahib had maintained to me quietly that Malcolm's life had been changed when Jean Craig became the wife of Neil Munro. Malcolm was not a man to give a sign either in the matter of hearts or estate; so I looked upon the Memsahib's theory as being purely intuitive.

But this day, when Malcolm came down the walk and topped the little gate with his huge bulk, and neglected entirely the great signs there were in the sky, with its

tangled clouds, for a dissertation upon the probabilities, I knew that he was deeply wrought up over something.

He came in, and we took our pipes to the bench on the lawn, with a Celtic slowness of beginning the real issue.

"Is there no word of Minister yet?" I asked presently.

Malcolm waved his pipe in the air, expressing the vacuity of everything.

"What are they saying about it—what do you think yourself, Malcolm?" He was a man requiring incentive to speak.

"There's always been a split in the Kirk over Neil Munro," Malcolm said thoughtfully.

From his manner he might have been addressing the bowl of his pipe.

"I didn't know of that," I expressed.

"Aye, I believe you," Malcolm said dryly, curling his lips inwardly with a smack of keen satisfaction. It was a reproof to my derelict attendance. Then he added, "Scotch bodies discuss these things among themselves, as a rule." He was letting me down a little.

"I'm sorry over this queer doing of Minister's; it'll give the other party a chance. They're mostly the stiff Highlanders from the Scotch Block, and they'll grab the opportunity as they grab everything else."

"But Munro was a good preacher," I objected; "an eloquent man."

"Aye, that was *one* of his faults."

"He tried to improve the village; he was bitter against the drinking."

"Yes, he made many a mistake."

"Surely that wasn't a fault?"

"Not if he had just introduced it in his sermons; but you see, Doctor, he tried to make them live up to it. Oh, he made lots of enemies; he was too young to have the serpent's wisdom. You see, in the Kirk we're for a lot of religion, but broadly put, man, broadly put. Men are all sinful; we accept that as a matter of belief, but not in our own households, if you understand. And Minister Munro was for nailing sinners to the cross. Have you heard what they're saying?"

"No, and I don't want to."

"Well, you'd best build a high wall round the Hedge at once then."

"For God's sake, Bain, we must keep vicious rumors from—from——"

"From Jean," Bain said, and the metallic cynicism had gone from his voice.

"You'll stand by her, Bain, I know."

"Aye, I'll do that if I fall away from the Kirk. I'm a busy man, I haven't much time to spare, but I'll take on myself to find the Minister and bring him back—if he's alive."

"Why do you say that?" I asked petulantly. "Of course he's alive—why should he be dead?"

It was strange how I resented this implied conviction on Bain's part, when I had held the same myself in speaking to the Memsahib.

"Aye, you're right—why should he be dead."

Bain repeated my words in a flat tone, almost devoid of interest, and I knew that in his mind he was saying, *"He is dead."*

There was no reason for this belief that was just an

impression; yet in reason there was only a very horrible explanation for the Minister's complete disappearance.

"They say a man saw Minister at Dundee the day he disappeared," Bain said presently.

"That's on the way to the States—likely he's gone there for a visit."

"It's on the way to Niagara, too," Bain croaked.

"What of that?"

"Yon cauldron is like a devil's magnet, it draws ill-balanced men like the sun draws frost from a tree. Here comes Donald MacKay," Bain continued. "I'm afraid he's standing in with the meddlesome party that'll be clamoring for a new minister before the pulpit is fair cold."

Bain was scanning the heavens. "I must be going," he said; "there's rain in that cloud. If it comes south of the mountain we'll get a wetting sure."

"There's no word o' the Minister, is there?" commenced MacKay when he was well within earshot.

"There's a deal of talk if there isn't word," answered Malcolm dryly.

"Have they dragged the pond?" asked MacKay.

"Drag your grandmother! Why should they drag the pond?" and Bain strode away, his boots hammering the board sidewalk ominously.

"I've heerd o' old maids being cranky," grunted MacKay, "but Bain should ha'e been married on some good woman to keep the milk o' human kindness warm in his breast. He's just sociable as long as you'll talk aboot the weather to him. My! but the town's lookin' lonesome this mornin'. One could fire a cannon doon the main street and

no touch a soul. Time'll drag, I'm fearin'; now the Skipper's took, the fishing's not worth the trying; and if Minister doesna come back there'll be no service the morrow, eh?"

But I was in no mood for his garrulous tongue. So I put on my hat, saying, "I'll jog to the office with you for my mail, Postmaster," and drew him away from the Hedge, launching him into lament over the worry that had come to the Kirk through the vagaries of Munro.

MacKay jabbed vindictively with his big stick at every third plank of the walk, as though he spitted a MacLean or a MacDougall at each thrust.

"Minister's gone as he came," he said. "He was a shaughlin body at best. I'm not sayin' this, mind you, like some of they ithers, because the poor body's back is turned, for from the first I maintained that his depth was no profoondity. I twigged, mind you, man, that when we didna understand him, he no understood himself. It was mostly vaporings; his theology was as different from what the Kirk was accustomed to as them newfangled, enamel pots are from the solid iron that oor mithers used, and didna blister an' crack at a bit o' heat."

"It was just Minister's way of trying to wake up the church sleepers," I argued, somewhat crossly. "They were just opiated with a sense of their holiness. Their own sins were small——"

"Aye, an' mean, too," MacKay interjected.

"Yes, mean; but they fancied that by praying hard and regular attendance they could show a balance on the righ side of the religious register, and were safe for a squeeze into Heaven."

"God forbid that such as the MacLaughlins should be discovered yonder; an' there are ithers o' the same ilk."

"Well, Munro was all for the young. I believe he thought the elders too firmly cast for him to do much one way or the other with them. But he sought to wake them to a sense of their responsibility for the sake of the sons and the daughters."

"Aye, he was always harping on the idea that we are the custodians o' ithers' morals—every man a brother's keeper. Fergus Black's sin in takin' a drop o' whisky was responsible for Dan MacLaughlin's lickin' Sandy MacDougall's John. It was all because of the evil example set by Elder Black according to Minister. I'll tell you, Doctor, at once, I dinna take stock in the missions; pagans are pagans, and Neil Munro, I'm thinkin', did little in India in the way o' salvation but come by these queer shaughlin' ideas himself. And Jean Craig brought this all on herself by marryin' him."

I was glad to see an excuse in my box—a letter, so I thumbed the glass front till MacKay went behind and passed the missive through the wicket. Even though it turned out to be but a bill that I opened, it did not dampen my feeling of relief. I knew the Postmaster's animosity was less of religious objection than because his own lout of a son, Peter, had sought Jean in marriage, animated, I firmly believed, by the father's knowledge that Jean had a fair dower.

"What are they saying?" the Memsahib asked when I reached home.

"The Christians are rowing among themselves already," I answered.

A flush spread over her face; she was angry in defense of the Church.

"Whom did you see?" she asked.

"Malcolm Bain."

"Well, he's a good Christian man, anyway, and he'll take the Minister's part. He'd lay down his life for Jean, Malcolm would, I think."

"But that may only complicate matters; he'd be a dangerous sort of knight perhaps."

"No, you hardly understand Bain's character. Honor and nobility of spirit possess his very being. He wanted to marry Jean years ago—he worshiped the ground she walked on."

"She should have wedded him."

"She would have done so, husband, had it been the Lord's will."

"She wouldn't have come by this trouble—Malcolm would never have deserted her."

"You are speaking hastily, husband," the Memsahib said, with gentle reproach. "We must just wait and see what the Lord's will is. But I tell you this, that Jean will stand her trial without complaint, and it's not for us to quarrel with what is."

Somehow an answer did not come handily to my lips, not a proper answer for a woman speaking in faith, at any rate, so I was almost glad when I heard a voice hailing me from the Hedge wicket.

There was the scuttle of a white something from the hall, with a clamorous protest in staccato yaps of defiance.

With my eyes shut I would have known that Blitz's

one aversion in the whole village, Robert Craig, stood at the threshold.

"Say, Doc, call off your dog," Robert said mockingly.

Blitz, having registered his protest, turned disdainfully, and, at my request, came back to the verandah, snarling his utter contempt for Jean's brother, who, swinging carelessly through the gate, loafed to the lawn bench.

Instinctively I studied his walk; his legs always had a barometrical bearing upon his mental condition. I knew, as I took a seat at his side, from subtle manifestations, that he was still somewhat in the over-night effects of his drinking.

It was strange to be thinking of his actual degradation while looking at the exquisite modeling of his face. He was beautiful; he had usurped much of the woman's beauty that should have been Jean's. Their mother had been the most beautiful woman in all the province. Aye, and here it was again, line on line, ineffable sweetness and ivory-tinted forehead, all in the face of the boy with the wealth of hair that was something between silver and gold. The too-rounded contour of the chin that shot forward to cradle a dimple, babbled about the weakness that should have gone to the gentler side of the house.

Irreverently I thought, in a retrospective cast of mind, that it was a curious misplacement of God's scheme of creation.

The boy must have been studying some wrinkles of thought that were a habit of mine, for he said, "Well, Doc, have you joined them?"

"Joined what—who?"

"The Pharisees—the sycophants. You look like 'em,

one of the mourners. But you're all right, old man; you didn't roast Neil when he was here like the others, and then pull a long face when he flew his kite."

"Don't talk that way, Robert," I counseled; "think of Jean, and what she suffers."

"Yes, she'll suffer. She'll wash the feet of that hypocrite and dry them with her hair—every day she'll do that, because she's so good herself that she doesn't know a counterfeit from the real coin."

"You're not turning against Neil, Robert?" I pleaded.

"No; I turned. He was a sweet one to forbid them giving me a drink at the hotel, wasn't he?"

"He did it for your own sake, Robert, and for your sister's sake."

"Well, what about himself?"

"What about him, Robert?" I asked vacuously.

"Yes, what about him—nothing. The praying hypocrites knew nothing, and I, Doc—'poor Robert,' as he used to call me—know nothing. There's a big query written at the end of his name in every house in Iona, and when they ask me I answer—*nothing*!"

"If you know anything you should tell it—anything is better than suspense."

"Is it—anything?"

"I think so."

"I don't, so I say—nothing."

What a curious mixture of weakness and strength was the boy. I contrasted him with Malcolm. If Malcolm had known anything, and deemed it wise to smother the knowledge, he would have smothered even his thoughts; but the boy must boast, like a weakling, of some knowledge

that was power, and then doggedly claim its sole guardianship.

"Very well," I said impatiently, "but you'll only add to Jean's misery by drinking now, Robert."

"Doc, you're a Christian Scientist. But you're only half a Christian and no scientist at all. You've got the cause and the effect playing cart before the horse—it's this accursed thing that started me off. It makes me boil when I think of——"

The boy stopped and flicked angrily at the lilacs with his cane.

"Of what, Robert?"

"Of Hell and its agents posing as sky pilots. And lecture! Lord! you'd think that howling in the church squared everything!"

The boy was up, and striding for the gate, angry with the insufficiency of the whole Christian faith, laid out weak and panting by his sophistical babble.

"Hold on, Robert!" I pleaded; "come in and talk to Jean."

He turned, and taking a step back we met. He scanned my face closely; perhaps he found pitying sympathy there, for he verged to a tone of confessional dependence. "I can't do it; I'm shaky," he whispered. "I'm shaky now, but I'll come back and see Jean. I'll come back, and I'm going to cut it out, sure. I'm going to quit!"

He was off before I could reply.

Perhaps the new-born tragedy in Jean's life was no greater than the inherited one in her brother's. That was the dreadful mockery of the boy's words when he said, "I'm going to cut it out." It was a taint, a living sore kept

alive by the corrosive of insatiate desire—the curse of Ham, undying, because it was still a thing of levity—the drink. The boy's father had died—rather had ended a living death in horrible alcoholic dissolution. I remembered him well, Andrew Craig. What the father had inherited of alcoholic desire I know not, he never spoke of it. Perhaps he had just been caught in the man-trap at the corner, the tavern, that low-shouldered corral of bricks and mortar that somehow I likened to the stockaded elephant Kheddas of India, or the buffalo corrals of the western plains wherein Indians slaughtered the vast prairie herds.

To me the bait in this place was more repulsive than alluring; examples of its destructive force were so ever evident. The whisky soaks—as the habitual bar loafers were called—were always about. And the tavern itself! How could its bare wooden floors, its long oaken bar, its walls, unadorned except by cheap lithographs and innumerable bottles, allure or hold any man who had any semblance of a home. Surely the poorest, most humble cottage in Iona should hold more of comfort or human companionship. And there was always some wrangling, uncouth, foul-mouthed, drink-enraged workman declaiming against his master, or the country, or the government, perhaps against his God. A possibility of shunning part of this intolerable element was afforded by little, square, dim-lighted rooms that were like cells in a jail. It would be in one of these minor spider parlors that Craig the father, and now Craig the son, would sit beside a little table and drink. Far better the open bar, for, in weak moral cowardice, each member of the little party must keep his end up—must call for another round.

Altogether it was a problem stupendous, beyond the power even of the Kirk. I had held aloof from it, knowing an incompetency even to advise. But isolated, neither of it nor actively antagonistic, I was like an observer of a game of chess, the weak moves from both sides were apparent.

I had watched Neil Munro's fierce assault upon this dominant evil. He had been a Ghazzi, a Peter the Hermit, quivering with passion, exhorting, pleading, denouncing, calling the wrath of God upon the apathy of those who mingled their whisky and their religion, seeking to vitiate the distaste of each with the other, swallowing the blend with unction. And what result? Deplorable.

A thought of how Neil's sensitive soul must have known the depression of unavail fell upon me, and from that, following the gruesome mood, recurred Malcolm Bain's awful hint of Niagara. Had Neil committed suicide? I drove the suggestion into the sod with my heel, tramped on it; it couldn't be! He held his responsibility to his Maker too majestically for that. But a man's mind, introspectively putting the case, no sooner downs a sophistry than it is up again in new form. Perhaps Minister had realized what Teacher had strongly hinted at, that his labors, too earnest, had but weakened the religious structure, caused the schism in the Kirk. Patently it had. Instead of standing shoulder to shoulder against the Evil One's strongest force, the congregation had split up—had come to squabbling over the plan of battle; half holding for the somnolent, undisturbing discourse such as had held them together during Douglass's fifteen years of ministry; and the others all for battling for the souls of the young men under the evangelistic banner of Minister Munro.

And Neil was certainly a modern Paul, as enthusiastically fearless. Ah! but just that, the words of Agrippa, "Almost thou persuadest me to become a Christian." There was a dozen—a hundred Agrippas in the congregation when they should have been absolute Christians. That was it, *almost*—the word that meant everything in the Devil's tally.

At this point in my thought the gate clicked. The Agnostic stood there and leaned his shoulders across the upper bar. "Have I disturbed you, Doctor?" he said in his quiet voice, catching my attention. "Were you busy?"

"I was heavily in the mysteries of religion," I answered. "Come in; I'm glad to be pulled out of waters too deep for me."

"There's little mystery about religion," the Agnostic said, as I made room for him on the bench; "Christ simplified it much. It's just an intensifying of human love—I'm not saying but that there's mystery galore over the many doctrines in the Church interpretations of the law of creation, or of God, or Pan, or whatever else we label it. But what started *you* on such a matter?"

"When you've looked on the face of one dead, one you've known intimately, your mind carries the image away with it, and sets the pale mask up where sometimes we want to place the living."

"Yes, man, I know!" The Agnostic's voice was a gasp of pain.

I could have bitten my foolish tongue, for his wife was dead but a year ago, and I had forgotten.

"I mean that Robert Craig was here a bit ago, and we were speaking of Neil Munro," I said hastily; "that way

came the train of thought. I was thinking of a soul's death."

"Aye, there may be such a thing, or worse; and if there is, I'm afraid the poor lad's in for it. According to religion he is, beyond doubt—the sins of the father exacting the penalty; and his chances of reformation are bad when Neil Munro could do nothing with him. But as for the other, Neil himself, it's different. He just went down before his friends—the worst kind of enemies when they choose. Still I'd rather take chances with him in his future—that is allowing that there's a good and a bad future according to belief—than I would wish to hobnob with half of that body," and he nodded toward the graystone pile across the way. "You'll find less of denunciation in holy writ against the beaten down than against the unctious, self-complacent good."

"Have you any idea, Major"—that was the Agnostic's name to us dwellers at the Hedge; to the village he was the Agnostic, on what ground was not apparent, for he was rich in his own conception of religion—"why Minister disappeared so mysteriously, or at all?"

"Just a surmise; that's all anyone has—unless the poor wife knows."

"She doesn't. What's your surmise?"

"Defeated—and he took it to heart. His judgment must have given way; he was a dreamer at best; he thought that God's intent, explained, was a power stronger than Bacchus and Elder Holyman"—the Major jerked his thumb angrily first at the tavern and then at the tabernacle.

"You see," he continued, "the village is dominated by two interests—that's all there is here." He wagged his

head from one side to the other, indicating the two structures of such seeming divergent interests. "People go to either one or the other—some go to both; they're the very dangerous ones—the man on the fence is the unknown quantity. Neil knew all this. What Peter, or Paul, or Simon, or Noah, or Moses did was not so important in his sight as what men were doing in Iona. But the men of Iona"—the Agnostic frowned at the church—"would rather listen to the shortcomings or the grandeur of these ancients than to a rebuke of their own doings. I've seen it. I've taken cognizance of the fathers mounting those wooden steps to commune with God—some of them for a long sleep of it in the kirk over the sermon—while their sons were going to the devil by the fast express of the bottle. How many young men of the village, Doctor, come out worth the while of their being born—ten per cent? That's the way Munro looked at it, and how he fought it. He started the Athletic Club; he took the smaller boys and drilled them as soldiers, buying the wooden guns out of his own pocket; he organized a cricket club, a literary association, debates, and all the rest of it, and what came of it? The MacLeans turned Iona into a Glenco for the MacDonalds; the MacRaes waylaid the Kerrs, two to one, and battered them; they were all like the states of ancient Greece that took each other by the throats—and the elders held aloof and pitied 'daft Neil.' He worked too feverishly; India had sapped his vitality, I think."

"And the pity of it is there are ugly stories going," I said.

"I haven't heard them; but I know the townies well and I'm sure Minister's condemned. He's like a good many

others that have attacked the national industry, pastime, and cherished friend of the Empire—Drink. Nine-tenths of the trouble is the treating," he continued. "I like a good beefsteak, but if, when I've eaten one, a friend said, 'Have another, for companionship,' I'd think him a fool, and if I ate it he'd think me an ass."

"But what's to be done?" I queried. "It's not a one-man's job anyway, it's for the legislators."

"You're wrong, I'm afraid," the Agnostic declared; "they had the 'Scott Act' here, closing the bars; and the mystery of it—the getting of a drink on the sly, the hidden jug in the cellar, like the forty thieves in their leathern bottles, cast such an atmosphere of romantic adventure about the business that the youths went into it wholesale. There are drunkards to this day that can trace their novitiate back to the 'Scott Act.'

"If a law could be enforced for sending a man to jail for a year for slitting his brother's throat with a glass of grog," he resumed, "it would be a deuced good thing. In spite of all our wisdom, our advancement, we've somehow got to go back to first principles—the survival of the fittest; drink and pray and take chances; and my regards to the place of business across the road."

With a bow to the church, and "good day" to me, the Agnostic was gone.

I sat on the bench for a time, watching curiously the play of the sunlight through the fretwork of maples. Where were we drifting anyway? I was like a horse in a bog, the more I floundered the deeper I sank in this slough of thought; and as a wise horse would have done under the circumstances, I gave it up and lay still. I started playing

with Blitz, pulling his tail, to the tune of a childish thought that perhaps if men pulled dogs' tails more, and rearranged God's work less, they would be happier.

Before I had finished my writing that afternoon, the Memsahib came to the study and drew me to the window, I saw Jean, the gray folds of her dress almost hidden in the shower of flowers the children were steadily pouring into her lap.

Perhaps it was the gold against the gray that caused the Memsahib to say:

"Jean has laid away all her dresses but that somber one. She is having two others made from the same material."

"I don't like that," I answered; "it's depressing. She'll become melancholic."

"No; it's just her way. With her it means constancy. She seems to feel instinctively that she is to be tried for many days."

"How does she know—did Neil leave a letter? It's all nonsense anyway," I added, impatiently; "we'll soon know one way or the other—Minister will be found alive, or—he'll be found. A man can't hide himself like that in this busy world."

"You reason, husband, as if you were laying out a garden, or planning a book, or making the rough sketch of a landscape; those are matters of limitation; this is illimitable, because it is God's doing."

"It's the unregenerate sleepers in the Church's doing," I answered sharply; "either that or just the mad act of an ill-balanced mind."

The Memsahib didn't answer except by a little sigh of

resignation, which was a tolerant reproof, and I studied Jean's face limned against the flowing background of the Hedge. I hadn't noticed before how extraordinary it was. Undoubtedly it bore resemblance to the face of the Madonna in the memorial window which cut the graystone wall of the kirk just beyond. The eyes were huge depths, pools that held indefinable power, great eyes, pleading, sympathetic, unchangeable eyes. Trying to fathom them I lost the play of the sunlight when it turned to bronze the rebellious hair. The Memsahib's hand on my arm recalled me. I asked her the question that had hung in waiting: "Jean *is* beautiful, isn't she? Strange I never noticed it before!"

"Many men have, though," the Memsahib whispered; "Malcolm worshiped her in his grand, solemn way. And I had hoped that Jean might have cared for him—they'd have been a noble couple, but '*Dieu dispose.*'"

"He directed her love toward Neil Munro," I said tentatively.

"Not as you think of it, husband. I don't believe she loved Munro as she might have loved—Malcolm, for instance. It was purely spiritual, her love for Minister."

"And the two are separable?"

"Sometimes. They were in Jean's case. With her it was real heroism. No, it wasn't a sacrifice; she was perfectly happy over it, she felt it was God's will. It was almost a purer thing than love such as we generally know of. Jean wanted to be a Christian."

"She is," I interposed.

"Yes, she is. She determined to be; she thought *that* a greater thing than being just the recipient of a man's love."

The Memsahib was discovering to me what I had been searching for that lay so deep in Jean's wondrous eyes.

"Jean suffered agony over her rebellious thoughts about the inefficacy of God's power. I've always been an elder sister to her, and she has cried to me in bitterness over the unanswering of her prayers for her father and her brother. Simon Craig was a good man, noble in thought and deed, and yet Jean saw him drifting, drifting to destruction, saw the inevitable doom of the drunkard throwing its black shadow over his life. She saw her brother, a boy with the face of a god and the voice of an angel, developing into a dissolute dipsomaniac. Once she lay in my arms all night pleading with God, asking Him to take her young life, beseeching the father and the son's Maker to give them strength, to save them from worse than death. She cried to me, and her despair was dreadful: 'Paul said that he died daily, but I die hourly—I die every minute of my life.' When there was seemingly no answer to her prayers she thought it was because of the very rebellion that was in her heart over the futility of God's power against the devil of destruction. Then, as you know, Neil Munro came from the mission field in India, and his magnetic earnestness, the soulful Christianity that burned in his impassioned eyes, inspired Jean with a love that was wholly spiritual. She thought she saw a way to throw herself into God's work, to become absolutely a servant of the Lord. It must have been God's will, His mysterious way of working, for Neil from the very first was in love with Jean. They were married—Minister was here but six months when they were married."

"Well, it looks to me that if this is God's plan it has gone very much awry. Anyway the sacrifice did no good."

"It wasn't a sacrifice, it was ordained."

"All sacrifices are spoken of in just that way. And that face is capable of such intense suffering, such despair. Why, anything might happen if Jean lost hope, if she once became convinced there was nothing to live for."

"She won't come to think that—Jean will have her baby to look forward to."

"Baby—what baby?"

But before the Memsahib could answer I understood. What I had looked upon at first as an irritating happening was broadening out into the whole scheme of the universe, the repeating circuit of eternity, God and goodness, sin and weakness, and constancy, and recreating.

I remained in subdued silence, and the Memsahib resumed: "I wanted to talk about this to you, husband. Our duty is plain, don't you think? We must carry Jean until either Neil comes back or the baby is born. She can live on hope till her child comes, and after that she *must* live for the little one. You won't mind, will you, husband—Jean's being here, I mean?"

"No."

"It will interfere with the writing—it will trouble you a little."

"No, it will help it; I'll think deeper. Humanity looms larger now than it did an hour ago. Even you——"

The Memsahib tiptoed up and kissed me on the cheek. "You make me happy, husband. Come, quick, there's Malcolm coming down the walk. It's just as well—it's better for him to always talk with you. It is too bad that the village is so uncharitable, but we've got to think of everything."

Clutching my hat I hurried to the gate.

"I'll not come in," Malcolm said, in answer to my invitation; "I'm in a hurry. I've a power of work these days, I've taken on the report for the Meteorological Department in York. This weather isn't going to last," he added, breaking off; "if the wind shifts to the southwest we'll have rain to-morrow."

But he tarried a long time talking to me till I suspected that his hurry was a pure fabrication. For some reason he did not wish to come in.

"I just called to tell Mrs. Cameron," he said, "that we've got a supply for the pulpit Sunday. It's only a student from Knox College, but it'll keep them quiet. There are some that would be willing to go without a sermon just to strengthen the feeling against Minister. But I wrote down to Dr. Monteith, and it's all arranged—unless we muddle it up like the men of Kintyre did."

"I didn't hear of that, Malcolm," I said, as an invitation for the story, knowing it was apt to be droll. There was a subtle undercurrent of humor tickling the pebbles at the bottom of Bain's deep-water solemnity.

"No, they're not talking much about it Kintyre way," Malcolm commenced. "It seems last summer Deacon MacPhail wrote to the Secretary of Knox college for a supply. At the last minute, ministers being scarce, old Dr. Monteith went to fill the pulpit himself. He's a very learned man, but—his personal appearance suggests decay; mind you it's all a false alarm, for he's clear-headed enough, especially on theology. Well, when the Doctor went to Kintyre they didn't know him for the President of the college, and he's a silent man, publishing more about God than

about himself, so they thought the Secretary had sent a superannuated minister just as a makeshift. When the good Doctor went away they voted his sermon very dull; they simply didn't understand it, man, that was the truth of it—it was too learned for them. But in a month Deacon MacPhail was writing again for a supply, and he added a postscript: "Please don't send the old duffer we had last time." MacPhail knew the Secretary personally, but he was away, and the letter came straight into the hands of Dr. Monteith himself."

"Was he angry, Bain?" I asked.

"Not a bit of it, he's too big a man for that. He wrote, saying he'd send his grandson, and he did—a student at Knox."

Bain chuckled; so did I for that matter, picturing the long face of MacPhail.

"There'll some of them be getting a surprise here, I'm thinking," Malcolm added; "for there'll not be time to send word to everyone. They'll stay at home on their farms Sabbath, complaining about the drought in religion."

"Any word of the lost man?" I asked.

"Not a word. I've sent a detective from York to Dundee to follow up any clews, and I've got a man at Niagara looking about. And, Cameron, would you mind taking a good look through the newspapers when they come to the house, and if there's anything—well, Mrs. Cameron would know how to break it? I've told them at the office to send telegrams to you direct."

"You're very thoughtful, Bain."

"I believe the wind is shifting," he said, holding up his

hand critically; "it's working around to the south'ard. There's a lot of wheat nearly ready to cut, and hot sunshine is what's wanted. Well, I'll be going home."

My eye followed Bain's massive figure with curious inquiry. Perhaps it was his powerful physique that made his delicacy of thought appear the more beautiful.

In the evening the Memsahib came into my study saying: "Have you got the papers yet? Hadn't you better get them and look through them before——?"

I clutched my hat and hurried to the village store and astonished the dealer by my indiscriminate taste for literature this evening; I wanted all the papers.

"You're just like the others, man," he said.

"How is that?" I asked.

"Well, you're a Tory, and you're takin' home the Liberal organ, the *Globe*, to read. Are you gettin' on the fence—is there any word of a turnover in the Government? I never saw the like. Here's Postmaster MacKay buying a Liberal organ, a man that for thirty years has sworn by the Conservative's Bible—the *Mail*. I never knew him to do such a thing before, never. I'll just have to rearrange all my customers—I'll be getting my supplies mixed. Up to now I could just take the voters' list and tick them off, Liberals and Conservatives, and order their party organs without askin' what they'd have. It's fair confusing. Anyway I'm sold out—you've got the last paper. And I never saw such diligent desire for readin' in Iona before. There must be some hint of Government change with a possibility of office for the hungry ones."

I left the dealer in his mystification, but I knew quite well why this demand. Like myself, the good people would

search diligently all the papers looking for news of the lost minister.

Indeed, opening the *Globe* as I hurried back, a headline startled me. "A man found dead," it read; and then, "Looks like suicide! Body cast up by the waters of Lake Ontario."

I read with feverish interest. I stood outside the gate to cull the dread secret all by myself. But the description relieved my fears, it was not Neil. "Five feet three," while Minister was tall—slender and tall, nearly six feet. That was all the paper held, just that shadow of a fear, but I realized now how deeply we sat in the gloom of Jean's trouble. I had promised the Memsahib something, bravely enough, but what a task—what a vista of restraint over thought and deed was opening up.

The children saved the evening from being absolute gloom. I had got into a pessimistic, morbid mood, and the Memsahib was tired.

We were somewhat of opportunists at the Hedge, irrational as to rules, allowing hunger to dictate the meal hour. Chiefly my doing, this, causing the Memsahib distraction and the villagers play for ridicule. I was the one man in Iona who had dinner at night, a grotesque unconventionality that appealed to them as something akin to the wearing of a silk hat.

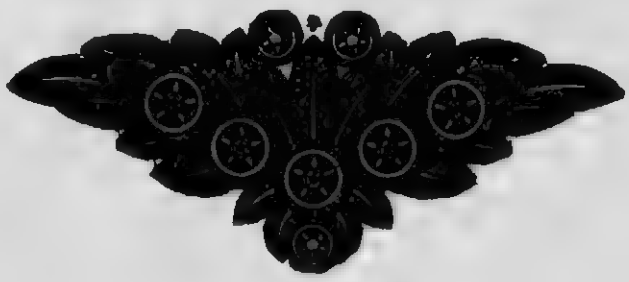
There was always an hour of unbridled license in my study after the evening meal; from seven to eight a group of Bedouins carried on a jirhad against decorum and order.

The Memsahib tickled the keys of the piano with ragtime touch, or droned it till it wailed like a bagpipe, and the children, led by Doo-doo, indulged in what they were pleased

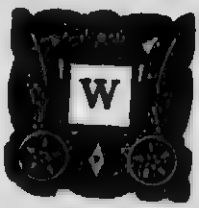
to call dancing. This was the very mildest manifestation of youthful exuberance; there were other less decorous performances. But it kept us all just children, and we had in my study the Pool of Water of Life that Ponce de Leon had explored Florida for.

But this night the children knew, and the piano knew, and the little ones sat like mice on the big sofa, their eyes wide and round in solemn half-comprehension, and I read to them "The Knight's Tale of Palamon and Arcita."

At eight o'clock Jean came by the longest kisses, and the double allotment of kisses; in fact I was almost forgotten—hardly included. That was the way we were taking up our load, even to the smallest; and yet, strangely enough, it was not a burden at all, we were eager for it.



CHAPTER III



HEN I awoke in the ·rning I tasted the bitter ash of regret in my soul. In active combat against sorrow there was a stimulus born of action; but this Sabbath morning found me in the depression of exhausted effort. Had I really been in deep sympathy?

"I shall not go to church to-day," I said to the Memsahib. "Listening to a student would make an infidel of any man."

Blitz, hearing my voice, had come smiling into the room. I am sure he winked at me when I said this, for he knew the fields with all the joy they held would be our portion. He rolled at my feet in delight as I laced the heavy walking boots that carried the history of tramps through beech woods and prowls by the banks of running brooks written in the delicate language which his fine nose alone might read. Those boots held not the decorous association of pews, and now he would not have the patient, sad wait, in a window, watching for my return from service.

As I loitered lazily after breakfast, the Memsahib turned me out of doors, saying: "Please get clear of the village before the people go to church. It doesn't look quite right to be meeting them."

Also Blitz was beckoning me forth, making great business of opening the gate with his paw.

Quite solemn and circumspect, as befitted the Sabbath hush that was over everything, I went the length of the village street. But my companion, not holding to the moral responsibilities of the day, *shikarried* cats. There are cats in the village at all times, but Sunday morning there is a double allotment. Perhaps this is because the boys are at Sunday school, or are restricted on the Sabbath. Blitz chases them, that is all; he has not caught one in the five years of his life here—yes, once; but that time it was two cats, and they caught him.

As I reach a bridge spanning the railway track, I congratulate myself that I have been too early for the church people, and have avoided all offense. Alas! I am premature in my satisfaction. Mrs. MacRae, worthy body, and earliest attendant, half checks as we meet, and says, "Good morning, Dr. Cameron; are ye lost?"

I've no doubt whatever but that she firmly believes this is the condition of my future. Then she adds with a Scotch delight of torture, "I was no' knowin' there was ony preaching out in the country."

"Oh, yes there is," I answered.

"An' who's the meenister?"

"Pan."

Mrs. MacRae pinched her chin, and her brow wrinkled over this that was evidently aberration.

"Aye, aye! Good morning, Dr. Cameron," and she was gone.

Blitz winked at me in commendation, and I am sure he

had my repartee quite as well as the good lady who had impaled me.

But she had an afterthought, stopping me just as I turned away.

"Who's takin' the service—have ye heard?" implying that if I had the information it would be casual. "Is there ony word o' Meenister yet?" she continued.

"None."

"Aye, aye! It's a dreadful affair altogether."

Then it occurred to me, too late, that I should have taken the road sooner, allowing for the Scotch curiosity that would draw the church members earlier this day for a bit of gossip before service.

But presently we had come into the sweet outer world, clear of the prison walls that held humans, with their insecure hold upon gentleness, the rich fruitage of existence.

I floated along (in reality I walked) between the fields of burnt gold, wherein rustling wheat whispered to the wind secrets of the ground dwellers—the moles and the beetles and the slugs that had their holdings down in the depths of the gold-tasseled forest. Then the bronze turbans of the grain gods faded into the gray-green of hay meadows where the slender-penciled timothy, patrician and of high caste, topped its brother, the full-bodied clover, a commoner of good living, sensuous, sweet of breath, wine-colored and cream-tinted of blossom. Star-eyed daisies, holding their pale cheeks all day to the kiss of the sun and turning their curved throats from east to west lest they lose one glance from the god of warmth, flooded the meadow like a milky way.

Not desolate in stillness the field, but a city of joyous folk. Boisterous crickets sang Bacchanalian songs; and artisan bees, turned pillagers, hummed lazy slumber songs as they looted wax from the defenseless flowers, till their thighs bulged like saddlebags, and pumped from the hearts of the clover nectar for a long winter's carouse. Grasshoppers, lean as greyhounds, poised in the air like kingfishers, sending the music of their shrill little pfiffaries far over the heads of the dwellers.

Far up the strip of bare earth the road, that was like a ribbon slit from tassa silk, a cloud of dust spiraled upward, and in the center of its ghostlike holding I could see the heavy heads of toil horses.

"People of order are coming, behave!" I said to Blitz; for on the first limb of a thorn tree, laden with green haws, sat a red squirrel, scolding back saucily at the frantic little white animal that jumped and yelped beneath.

"Is there any service, Dr. Cameron?" the driver of the wagon said, pulling up beside me. "I heard there was, but you're no headin' for the kirk."

"There is service," I answered.

"Ony word o' Minister yet—is he back? Is there any truth in what they're saying up the line?"

"He's not back. I don't know what they're saying up the line, but I'm sure it's not true if it reflects on Minister Munro."

"Just that—aye, aye! that's what Maggie was saying."

And Maggie, looking very happy that we were on the same side, beamed upon me and chimed: "No one'll make me believe that Minister wasn't a good man. He trod a bit hard on their corns—that's what's troubling them."

But the husband, Angus MacLean, had gathered up his reins, and, as they sped away, I slipped through a portal of the meadow city wall. Huge and gnarled, like stranded devilfish, were the giant pine stumps that, shoulder to shoulder, fenced the meadow from the roadway; the storm-bleached roots, evil-twisting, outlined against the blue sky like a cartoon of Doré's.

As my rude feet thrust ruthlessly at the heart-shaped leaves of the clover, diminutive grasshoppers, lemon-green, possessed of Gulliver's many-leagued boots, shot like tiny rockets across my path that led toward a pine wood, which the Memsahib, who was fond of christening everything, had named "Toilers' Paradise."

Behind me on the roadway another cloud of dust was idly moving villageward; but I had escaped its raisers. No more questions to conjure up the treacherous spirit of doubt that the sunshine and the fields were laying low.

Beneath the pines are couches for a regiment, a thousand men, soft-trussed by the dead needles. I threw myself down in luxuriant abandon; I lighted my pipe defiantly; while Blitz ransacked the undergrow for prey. His energy is wasted, for in the forest live none so foolish as to yield themselves to his clamorous, scurrying onslaught.

Presently the Gentleman of the Black Stock, with measured swoop of wing, sidles in from the open, and perches above me. I am something for his morbid curiosity. The crow preens his blue-black head, and shafts of sunlight are alchemized into a filagree of copper and gold, and jewels of turquoise and sapphire and ruby in his mirroring coat. He is a comely villain, complacently self-satisfied. Of me he is suspicious.

"Aw-w-w-w there!" he exclaims, and waits for me to explain my presence.

I answer nothing, but in fancy interpret his harangue as, "Rooked you, did they?"

Does he think I am come here in despair to hide from my unfellow-men? Perhaps he knows of this sort of thing. A sudden chilling thought strikes at my heart. Shall I never more get away from the questions? Have I escaped from the churchgoers to come by the gruesome suggestions of this prowler? Has he seen some one stricken to madness lay himself down to the rest of Nirvana?

In a rage I hurl a stick at the prating fool, and he weaves away through the heavy pattern of somber green, sending back a harsh laugh of derision. I spring to my feet possessed of this gloomy fancy which the crow's carrion laugh has bred, and search the pine wood for something I do not want to find.

It is but a mild frenzy. Was not the missing man seen at Dundee? Doubt answers, "That was just a rumor."

Then my memory reads on its hidden page two records, black-bordered, that are akin to this gruesome thought. A year ago one wearied to insanity had been found in the little river where it brawls down from the mountain; and Trout Lake, just a pond, had held the solution to the other mystery, yielding its answer to the grapple hooks.

I find nothing but a big patch of sunlight; the rotunda of the pine wood, breast high with raspberry bushes, ruby-studded with fruit. And here are the guests gossiping, and no doubt criticising one another's manner of dress; robins that have taken voice culture, and a bluejay that needs it, with his harsh repellant rasp. A songsparrow hails my ap-

pearance with a trill of merriment; and Blitz, bounding into the brambles, raises a cloud of pudgy little birds.

The sunlight is good, it warms my marrow, it peoples my mind with thoughts of things living.

I look at my watch; one o'clock! and the roast is timed for half past one; I can just make it.

Spurred by thought of the Memsahib's reproach, I stretch my legs, shortcutting it through a pasture field, the pile of its velvet carpet close-shorn by the firm lips of cows till it is like an antique Persian rug.

As I clamber over the high rail fence that is weathered to purple, I miss Blitz, and, sitting atop the upper rail, I whistle. A ki-yi of eager delight answers me from back in the field.

I call and whistle unavailingly; then, full of anger, and also fearing that perhaps he is caught in something, I hasten back over my trail. Behind a little grassless mound of earth Blitz's stubby white tail is showing clear of a ground hog's doorway. A cloud of sand thrown by the delver's paws issues from between his hind legs. When I speak he unearths long enough to look up in approval of my return, and then worms his body into the burrow like a cork in a bottle. But it is no time for *shikarri*, so I hook the crook of my walking stick in his collar, and away we go.

I am scarce under way on the road again before I hear the rattle of wheels behind. The wheels are very rattley, for it is old Mrs. Paisley's antique buggy, and also ancient horse; I really believe that part of the creaking comes from his knees.

Now she has checked her wingless Pegasus as I step to one side, and asks, "Will you have a lift, Doctor?"

After all I shall surely be in time now, I think, as I clamber to a seat at her side.

"You've been up to Stonehill for church, I suppose. It's a long drive, four miles, just for service," I say.

"I dinna mind it; if it was fifty I'd rather make it than sit by yon screeching whustles in our own kirk."

"You're still unreconciled to the organ then, Mrs. Paisley."

"Aye, just that, un-ree-conciled. That's well put, Doctor. And I'm thinking the Kirk itself is un-ree-conciled judging o' the peck o' trouble has come tae it."

"What has the organ got to do with that, Mrs. Paisley?" I asked, thinking what a tenacious, bitter thing the Scotch antipathy was. For ten years the old body had traveled every Sabbath to Stonehill rather than enter her own church that had so far lapsed from grace as to echo to the sounds of an organ.

"Weel, it has to do wi' it in this way," she said—as the old horse seemed inclined to stop to listen I surreptitiously prodded his thigh with my walking stick, for I was in a fair way of being too late for dinner after all—"it's just a visitation, or proof of Biblical truth," Mrs. Paisley continued; "it's the sins o' the faethers visited on the children. It was Jean Craig's faether—and a stiff-neck he was, too, when he tuk a notion—that was the insteegator o' puttin' yon Devil's bagpipe in the kirk. It was Satan drivin' a wedge o' sin intil the kirk through drink, d'ye ken; fiddling and singing and dancing go together, and there was all o' that doon tae the tavern at the corner, and naething but dry releegion at the kirk, so it had to be changed. Craig gave fifty dollars toward the organ himsel'. And d'ye ken this, Doctor, I've heerd it for

the truth, yon same man, old Craig, refused tae contreebute tae the mission funds"—the old lady lowered her voice, and added, almost in a whisper—"old man Craig said, when they gang tae him for a subscreeption, that the Pagans in India who worship graven images were better Christians nor the members of our ain congregation. Wasn't that enough tae rile the Lord, Doctor? It would rile onybody—it did me when I heard it. He was a' for new-fangled notions, putting yon gaudy window in the kirk too. I dinna ken what that cost him, something awfu' the price, I believe—it would ha'e bought hundreds o' Bibles for the benighted Pagans. When I used tae attend, afore the organ came, just the smattering o' the sun through a' them gaudy lights glowered me eyes so I couldna discern a body in kirk; I couldna' make out a MacPhail frae a Graham—their faces just blotches of blue and yellow like pictures o' gorillas more than Christians."

Steeped in her favorite narcotic, the theme of the organ, Mrs. Paisley, to my pleasure, had forgotten the newer trouble. I was congratulating myself, for she had a prying tongue, when she broke vigorously through my complacency, exclaiming:

"Man alive! I was near forgetting to ask if ye had any word o' the Meenister. Mrs. Lancey, at Stonehill, was telling me there was a body found in the Welland Canal, and the descreeption o' it was vera like Meenister."

"Why should he be in the canal?" I asked petulantly.

"Aye, just that! A strange place for Meenister sure enough. I told her I didna believe it. But then, again, Doctor. the man must be somewhere, and if he's no in the canal, where is he, say I? There's just been naething but

trouble for the Craigs ever since that organ was instectuted. The old man Craig died in drink, and the son, Robert, will die the same way—God forbid! but he will. And Jean, she was the best o' the lot, she has her ain trouble noo. I was often wondering, Doctor"—she turned and searched my face with her small, gray eyes—"whether it was objecting tae the organ kept you from attending kirk—you dinna go often. Ha'e ye ony scruples that way yersel'? Because if you ha'e ony I could gi'e ye a lift tae service at Stonehill every Sabbath—there and back."

While I decline this kind offer we turn a corner and are jogging down the village street. It is deserted. From each dwelling issues a tell-tale odor of the day's fare. Blitz's nose is in the air; so is mine. At the little brick cottage it is roast pork, I will swear; from the large graystone where dwells the keeper of our general store, comes the respectable announcement of roast beef.

Something of village smartness creeps into the old horse's mind; he pricks up his ears, and we rattle down the main street—it is really downhill—at almost an unseemly gait on the Sabbath for people who frown upon the organ.

After all I am a little late. I plead the episode of the ground hog, but the Memsahib says dryly, "Oh, yes; blame it on Blitz."

She has met me at the door and adds, "I have brought Malcolm Bain home for dinner."

The dining table, fitted to seven, is lengthened by an extra leaf, which gives an air of unusual formality.

For the first time since I have known Malcolm Bain I notice a change in him. He is a big man physically, even mentally, and now his hands appear to trouble him—ti ey are

in the way—they are too large even for his width of shoulder; he is embarrassed, awkward. Perhaps my perspective has been deranged by the elegant small-fry of the fields.

"I was glad you were not at church this morning," the Memsahib said.

"So was I," I answered, "for it is glorious out in the fields to-day."

"We had such a trying sermon," she continued. "The Supply was just a boy; he read his sermon, and was so nervous that we could hardly hear a word. Poor Teacher Harkett nearly fainted when he rose and in a small, squeaky voice gave out the wrong hymn."

"That was what made the commotion in the choir, was it?" Bain asked. "I thought the organ had broken down."

'We got through it some way or other, but it was dreadful. In her nervous excitement Miss Harkett plunged into the tune of 'Art Thou Weary,' while the congregation cheerfully sang to it from the number the minister had announced, 'Onward Christian Soldiers.'"

"It must have been a rare entanglement, a little worse than usual," I suggested. "What did the choir do?"

"I think some of us took part with the congregation while some followed the organist. It sounded like that. Teacher was ready to cry from sheer nervousness. You know she lays out the choir chairs according to the pattern of the carpet—don't laugh, it's quite true—she's awfully fussy, and this morning they were all wrong; it was just trying to one's own nerves to watch Teacher's misery."

"I'm afraid I came by little good myself," Bain declared. "Amateur theology is like unripe fruit—children may take it without harm, but it doesn't agree with older folk. Dis-

crimination is a sad handicap, it limits one's enjoyment; nothing but the best we're wanting, and that's not always to be come by."

"Student preachers are a great lottery," I suggested, just to fill a void left by Bain's suddenly stopping in embarrassment as though he felt he had said too much.

"There was little time to arrange for a supply. Next Sabbath—" again Malcolm hesitated in affright; he had blundered. But he struck out bravely, adding, "Next Sabbath we'll have our own minister back."

I looked at Jean. Her face was quite white, but I believe there was a look of gratitude in her eyes.

Kippie broke the awful silence that had come upon us, taking advantage of it to say, "I 'member the text, Mudder."

Mentally I promised Kippie five cents over this relief, and the Memsahib seized upon the opportunity with avidity, saying, coaxingly, "That's a good girl; can you repeat it?"

The little one smiled bashfully.

"You've forgotten it, Kippie," I taunted, making the most of the situation.

"Show Father that you haven't—quick, before the pudding is brought in!" Memsahib encouraged. "What was it now?"

"'Divide with us, for the day is far spent.'"

It was indeed cruel to laugh at a little child's mistake, and sinful because of the subject, but I declare that a smile hovered for a second about even Jean Munro's lips.

In my mind I doubled Kippie's reward; and her mother said gently, "It's *a-bide* with us, darling."

Jean put her head down and kissed Kippie, saying, "You sweet angel!"

I felt that Bain was eager to beat a retreat, so when we rose I carried him off to the lawn for a smoke.

"I made a fine mess of it," he lamented when we were alone.

"It was a dangerous subject," I answered. "We should have talked about the weather."

"The weather is an interesting study," Malcolm added solemnly. "This church trouble is taking up so much of my time just now that I've lost all track of a storm I was following from Dakota. It was due here to-day, but it may have gone south of the lakes."

"There is no trace at all of Minister?" I asked.

"None."

"It's strange."

"Yes."

I told Bain what I had heard from Angus MacLean about the gossip up the line.

"Yes, I've heard it—the hounds!" he answered bitterly.

"What is it, it can't be money?"

"What they're always ready to accuse a good-living man of."

"Ill living," I suggested.

"Yes."

"But it's a black lie," I declared. "He worshiped his wife—and well he might, one of the sweetest women that ever lived."

"She is that. And Munro was as good; but he was not as strong as might be—I don't mean morally—he was a wee bit weak in the fiber, he couldn't last out against the Philistines; he was brave enough in the attack, but they just wore

him out by taking no heed—turning the other tough cheek of indifference for him to smite at."

"Still if he was brave—and he was—he wouldn't go away and leave——"

"No, that's the mystery of it. There's only one explanation—he was deranged. And if he was that, God knows what he mightn't do with himself."

"But if he had made away with himself, it would be known—he'd have been found."

"And if he were alive there'd be some trace of him, I'm thinking. We're searching everywhere. He didn't cross Niagara, I know."

"Well, it can't be for long, this terrible suspense; it will be settled one way or the other soon."

"I hope so. I'll fight to keep the pulpit vacant for him, but there're some that'll fight hard the other way; they were against him."

"Yes, you must do that, Bain. While the Church waits for his return, as it were, it'll keep alive hope in the wife's heart. I'm sure that if they extend a call to another minister, she'll think they consider him dead."

"I'll keep it open," Bain answered, and his head sat on his strong neck like a picture of a grim Covenanter.

"Are you going?" I asked as he rose.

"Yes, if you say good-by to Mrs. Cameron and Mrs. Munro for me. I want to have a bit walk, and I think there'll be rain before night. Yon mackerel sky presages a change."

CHAPTER IV

SOMEHOW I was dreading the evening.

The July night glided in with a silencing depression. The trident leaves of the maple rustled in a faint listlessness above the sleeping lilac hedge. The sky that had glowered red in the wake of the setting sun was now blurred by a vast cloud that menaced a storm.

Across the roadway worshipers passed up the church steps and through its Gothic doorway in a continuous file; they were like a flock of sheep seeking the evening fold. Many of them turned their eyes curiously the way of Lilac Hedge.

I was glad the Memsahib had elected to stay at home, for I felt incapable of consolation.

In the hammock, shielded by the hedge from the eyes of the churchgoers, Jean Munro had about her a little court of sympathy—the children.

Presently the Memsahib came to the door and called eagerly: "Come here, John, quick; Cricket is back. He's chirping on the hearth in your study."

The children jumped up with joyous cries: "Oh, the cricket! goody, goody! Come, Aunt Jean, and hear Cricket."

Very quietly we stood in the hallway and listened. There he was, as joyful as a sandboy, "Creak, creak, creak!"

Then we went back to the lawn, and Memsahib told Jean at great length all about Cricket. Of course it was to draw her mind from the dread and misery.

"That means good luck," Memsahib explained. "We haven't heard him for a long time now. We were afraid he had got killed or frozen up, or something, last winter. He's been with us for three or four years—we're sure it's the same one."

"Of course it is," I interposed.

"Oh, yes," Doo-doo affirmed; "no strange cricket would be so wise; he wouldn't know us as old Creaker does."

"He came to us in the oddest way," Memsahib continued. "A load of hay was going down the lane to the stable, and he got brushed off against the kitchen shutters. He lives most of the time in the old fireplace in the kitchen—it never has a fire, you know."

"But he wanders all over the house," I added. "Tell Jean about Sarah saving him when he was shipwrecked."

The children laugh at this weak attempt at facetiousness, and Memsahib tells the simple story. "Sarah found him in the bath floating about on the water. He must have been after a drink; he was nearly drowned, poor little chap! She took him to bed with her, and in the morning he was perched on her pillow, quite chippy."

"And Blitz won't touch him," Doo-doo added; "Blitz knows he belongs to the house. He'll just go up and sniff at Creaker when he sees him on the floor."

"He's our mascot, our four-leafed clover, our found horseshoe"—I was preparing the way for a clever little plot

of distraction I suddenly caught a glimpse of, for Cricket should be dragged into the general crusade against morbid depression. I cast about in my mind for enlarging correlatives. A cricket was such a tiny offset to huge Black Care that I must use the story-building faculty. I even traveled across seas to Burma for an apposite, substantiating touch.

"At the Hedge here," I said, "we're as much people of lucky omens as the nature worshipers in Burma. There they have the 'tucktaw,' a most repulsive-looking lizard, as representing the god of good luck in a household. If this lizard crawls about the walls—though he is generally in the leaf roof—catching flies, and occasionally uttering his dismal 'Tucktaw-w, tucktaw-w-w!' nine times, the dwellers will remain happy, feeling that their household gods will come to no evil."

"Faith is a great thing"—Jean surprised me with this sudden expression. "And you have Cricket as a tucktaw, Doctor?"

"Yes; and we are in for a run of luck now that he has come back. Last year he helped me wonderfully to write a book."

Doo-doo laughed outright. I was sure that Jean was smiling at this oddity.

"Indeed he did. He was all over my study, singing like a sandpiper."

"Do sandpipers sing, Father?" Doo-doo, who takes nature study at school, asked.

"I don't know," I answered, "but Cricket did."

"And your book was successful—I heard a great deal about it," Jean commented.

"It really wasn't"—I forgot the real trend of the good-luck argument enough to say—"it fell very flat."

The Memsahib interposed with an explanation—she always had one when my work failed. "Last year was the tail end of the historical novel tied to the nose of the industry narrative, and John's story was about Indians. It was too original."

"'Primitive' was the word used by the critics. The editor I submitted it to gave as reason for declining it that he wanted stories of people with clothes on."

"I love animal stories best of all," Doo-doo cried enthusiastically; "animals are lovely. Father won't let us kill even a spider at the Hedge; and now I'm not a bit afraid of them. If it weren't for Mother, Father and I would have all the strange cats in the village. Even Blitz won't touch my kitten now. He killed the first one I brought home, naughty dog! I cried. Do you like hens, Aunt Jean?"

"Roasted, Doo-doo."

If somebody had suddenly blazed away at me with a shotgun from over the hedge I should have been less astonished, though far less pleased. I had barely thought enough left to laugh. The hens were an inspiration.

"I mean hens going to bed," Doo-doo explained. "Father and I often watch them at roosting time. They're the silliest creatures in the world. There's one old mother hen, a Plymouth Rock, she bullies the others something dreadful. She's fat and lazy—that's why Father named her the Dowager; she walks around scolding and complaining about having to get up on a roost, and waits till it's all full, then Dowager goes to one end, and makes a lot of motions

that she's going to fly up. Father says that Dowager says, 'Watch me now, I'm going to fly!' Then she makes such a row with her wings; and when she's up she starts crowding and pecking and scolding—I suppose Dowager thinks the others have the best places—until she clears the whole long roost of every chicken. Then they fly up on the others; I don't think they see very well in the dark. And such a row!"

How happily we were getting on. I was just making a mental note about a string of agate beads Doo-doo had her eye on at the jeweler's, when, across the way, the organ pealed forth in the sonorous notes of the opening hymn. It hushed our chatter; it drove the brightness from Jean's eyes; it brought us from the pleasant gone days to the bitter present.

Apprehensively I watched Jean. Perhaps of all the hours that had gone or were to come this, in the gloaming, with all that the church service suggested, would be the most bitter trial.

After a time the student-minister's voice came fitfully to our ears. Carrying no words, it sounded petulant, like the strange articulations of a mute.

"Odd, isn't it," Memsahib said, "that we can hear his voice from across the street, when inside the church I was sure it didn't reach to the back pews."

I was thinking how unlike it was to the full, rich voice I had listened to many Sabbath evenings from the lawn when Neil Munro thundered at the stiff-necked Scots.

The quiet suggested sleep to the children, and when they had gone to bed our heavy silence seemed almost unbreakable. I think we three sat with the one thought tenant in

our minds, the unwelcome intrusive guest of Neil's mysterious fate, our eyes fixed idly upon the one object of interest in the somber landscape of approaching night, the memorial window in the church.

But half conscious of its full import the Memsahib said: "That window lighted up always gives me a feeling of peace, of rest, of solace. The Madonna with the infant Jesus in her lap seems so far removed from everything but just the adorable love that is in motherhood that I think of my own little ones, and forget trials which have seemed so bitter through the day."

"Yes, motherhood is the greatest thing in the world," I advanced; "it is creation itself—that is, in its highest form."

"If life were not a part of God Himself, a pulsating manifestation of the soul, this engrossing adoration of a mother for her child would be idolatrous," the Memsahib continued in a thoughtful way. "See how the Virgin scarce notices the homage of the shepherds; the babe in her arm is everything, the whole world—even the absence of the father is not felt."

The Memsahib stopped awkwardly; her last words had faltered. I knew they had thrown her into a confusion. What slippery ice we traveled upon. But she came bravely to her own rescue, saying: "A baby will make a woman of a woman when nothing else will; it will cause her to bear up against everything. I often think when I see some of the women here who have been married two or three years, and have no children, fluttering about, trying to get up little card parties or dances, or something to kill time in what they style 'this dull old place,' that they would be far happier

and of more real use in the world if they had children to interest them."

The organ droned a gentle "Amen" to the Memsahib's most wise reflections on the sisterhood. The prelude grew in volume; as it hushed again, a sweet tenor voice carried on the night air over the lilacs singing:

"'I hear thee speak of a better land;
Thou callest the children a happy band;
Mother, where is that radiant shore?
Shall we not seek it and weep no more?
Is it where the flower of the orange blows,
Or the fireflies dance through the myrtle boughs?
Not there, not there, my child.'"

"I think Robert's voice grows sweeter every day," Memsahib said, as the last words of the song died away.

"He has the best voice I have ever heard," I added, just to drown a noise that was suspiciously like a sob.

"I think I will retire, Allis," Jean said, rising. "It's been so restful sitting here to-night. I'm so glad that Robert is singing in the choir again."

"I'll go up with you to light your lamp, Jean," the Memsahib offered.

When she came back she said: "It has done Jean good. She has sat for days dry-eyed until her soul was hot; but she has had a good cry now, and I think she'll sleep."

I reached over and kissed the little woman on the forehead, much as a tribute to her wise intelligence in going up to light that lamp.

"Jean will think always now of the Madonna and the

Infant; it will keep her mind more on her own baby that will be a saviour to her."

"And if anything does happen, if we come to know anything, we must keep it from her, wife, even if we have to tell lies."

"Yes, we must."

This resolve silenced us for a little; my thoughts were busy with an odd fancy that the blue-gowned Madonna's face was strangely like Jean's.

The church door swung open, tossing out a square of yellow light; there was a shuffle of feet, and grotesquely shadowed heads blurred the blue gown of the Madonna. The worshipers came down the steps; their forms loomed large in the uncertain light, and then melted away.

The flood of blue and crimson and gold-colored light died out suddenly from the window, and the somber wall of the stone church stood silent and grim, like a ruined, lifeless cathedral, against the night sky.

"It was Jean's father put that window in the church," the Memsahib said, as we entered the house, "in memory of Jean's mother."

CHAPTER V

NEXT day the Memsahib suggested that I should encroach personally into Malcolm's life; that the observed friendship between us two men would cause his now often coming to the Hedge, to appear more of our masculine association than a suggestion for gossip that Bain came because of Jean's presence with us. It was a delicate thought, altogether too subtle for the vandalic consideration of our coarse-fibered villagers, I feared.

But I had myself, by this time, an itching desire to know Bain—to crackle the crust of his reserve. So that afternoon I said to him as he halted at my gate: "I'll walk along with you, Bain. My mind is clamoring for a game at words; this—as Shaftesbury calls it—'self-inspection' is the father of moroseness."

So we swung along together, our faces holding the yellow blare of the sun in the west, for a half-mile to where Bain's square, red-brick home half hid its severe outline behind two giant locust trees.

Bain thrust open an iron gate to a cinder path that stretched a narrow avenue, graced on either side by a broad-shouldered acacia hedge, to the white-pillared portico of the house.

The spruce and balsam that interlaced their arms in a little forest, clothing with an olive-green mantle the rounded breast of a hill that laved its feet in a joyous burling brook, caged a choir of feathered songsters that piped and sang and twittered and whistled in a revelry of music, just as though there was nothing else in the world but cool sylvan retreats and well-filled stomachs, and joyous outpourings of thankfulness for all this happiness that was nothing but the essence of existence.

Bain caught an intuitive knowledge of my absorption in earth's panaceatic draughts of delight, for he led the way, skirting the huge quadrangle of bricks, to the brow of the hill beyond, where a bench, curiously fashioned in the gnarled twistings of a tortuous cedar, gave a resting place, from which I looked down upon a stream of molten lead and silver and gold that ran, in fluid blend, from some crucible held in the rock lap of a towering upland beyond. The brook leaped from ledge to ledge, a silver veil like that of Mahmud's screening from view the fleshless rock beneath; then it swirled in a pool that hovered on butterfly wings of transcendent beauty, gay in its azure and green and yellow and crimson festooning as a shimmering rainbow, or the color-dappled breast of a peacock. Fragments of lacelike silverwork were tossed into the sunlight from the unseen fingers of elfin artisans laboring in the caverns below.

"The trout are jumping fine," Malcolm said, shattering my fancy with his realistic fact.

The sound of his voice brought a torrent of expostulating "chir-r-r-rhs!" from a startled red squirrel that had crept curiously to a zigzagging arm of the cedar above our heads.

"Cross, Patsy?" Malcolm asked, casting his eye up at

the bush-tailed chatterer. "He'd be down here on my knee," Bain explained, "if I were alone."

"What an innocent creature a squirrel is," I observed.

"He's like the rest of us," Malcolm declared, "possessed of the devil of destruction."

My eyes showed surprise, and he continued: "The young rascal eats the robins' eggs; he's a prodigal, putting by nothing for a rainy day, a brigand. Yonder's his well—rather his fountain of drink"—Bain's thumb indicated a maple. "He cuts the little limbs and drinks the blood of the tree—he's a vampire. And if he misses the eggs of the robins, when the young are hatched he throws them out of the nest. Patsy is bad clean through. Ah!"

A shaft of blue had shot down through the sunlight like a sapphire hand grenade; and then from a spray of sparkling water it had swirled upward again to the overhanging limb of a patriarchal elm.

"The Kingfisher!" Malcolm said—"gorging himself with a tiny casket of life. Destruction is the mainspring of creation it seems; superficially, beyond the sweep of the chief destroyer, Man, all is peace and sweetness; actually, it is one great war. The martens drive out the sparrows, and the wren drives out the marten, and the black-hooded crow prowls, a thief and a murderer."

Malcolm rose from the bench, and we turned back by another path that was like a brown blank in the mottled mosaic of a Turkish rug. Our feet brushed the velvet cheeks of pansies that drooped their wealth of hue across our way; and in our nostrils hung the tealike perfume that rolled in clouds from a drape of crimson roses that hid the high house wall.

A pair of robins hopped grotesquely in confident fearlessness just beyond the string of pansy beads.

"That's a hardy cock robin for you," Malcolm said—"the pair of them, in fact, for they stayed by me all winter. They're like a good many humans, though, after all—they'll cleave so long as you feed them. I think the old robin took a delight in making himself believe things. He's a bit like the tiger, he'll only eat of his own kill—no dead meat for him. I used to hang a piece of fresh beef by a string, and the wind would keep it moving, and whether he thought it was alive, or made a pretense of so doing, I don't know, but he'd eat of it. Put the same piece on a board or on the ground, and he wouldn't touch it."

We had passed into the house as Malcolm talked, and here again was the same simplicity softened to beauty by touches of color.

I had pictured Malcolm's home as being like some of the others I had seen, wherein dwelt people allied to the soil-tiller's life; a furniture of utility; a decoration of limited art instinct and tuition; a crude, barren savagery of taste, following in a picture the lines of hardness and crudity of color with geometric delight—carrying the value of a straight furrow into a massacre of curving lines of beauty: a godless, soul-depressing barrenness, suggesting a perihelion of habitable environment, complement to an existence devoted solely to acquisition.

We passed from a wide hall, the ring of our heels on the maple floor muffled in another step by the plush of a Turkish rug, to the subdued restfulness of a room paneled in walnut. Like faces peering from the distance in a Rembrandt, the holdings of the room crept gradually from the brown shad-

ows and claimed my eye. A piano; tawny bookcases, flicked soberly with deep red, and rich ochre, and emerald green, where the volumes rested on their shelves.

Malcolm threw up a blind, and the light bathed a group of toilers in a wheat field eye-level on the wall. I knew the sweep of the brush that had fastened those pigments to the canvas.

"A Reid!" I said, indicating the oil.

"Yes; and yonder's another—'The Forced Sale.' They are windows looking out upon our national life of toil and struggle and sometimes failure. Reid has the soul of the man who wrote, 'This is my own, my native land.'"

Indeed it was a curious Bain that was issuing through the crevices of his armor. The divine truth flitted through my mind on the wings of fancy, that all this that I saw of refinement, that was like the Armless One of Milo come upon in a butcher's mart, was because of Jean. Before Malcolm had switched to the trail of accepted loneliness, perhaps Jean had inspired all this of delicate home arrangement.

The pictures might have meant offerings to the spirit, within Malcolm himself, that loved the pansies, and the iridescent brook, and the rose-covered wall, but the piano stood a rosewood monument to a yearning that had died. Unconsciously my fingers strayed to the keyboard cover—it was locked. Something told me that it had always been locked, and while Malcolm lived it would remain locked. Curious testimony, these inanimate witnesses gave.

The books climbed one wall, shelf upon shelf, just as the roses mounted the outer bricks. Did Bain read these—their backs carrying names that were of a race alien to the toilers

whose shadows intercepted ours daily on the village streets? What did they know of Bacon and Tyndal and De Quincey and Steel and Addison—or these men of the shelves know of them? And if Bain hobnobbed with Pope and Johnson and Dr. Bentley in their murky Stagira, why did he leave them coffined here in their buckram, and gossip about the price of wool or the vile condition of country roads with the village group, hiding his burning bush under a wooden vegetable measure?

A grotesque fancy took me from the other side answering this query. What if Bain had transported a metaphysical shadow from that third shelf niching Meister Eckhart, Jacob Boehme—filled his huge head with intricate passages from Nicholas of Cusa, Barcelsus, culled flowers from their nature philosophy of the Renaissance, and, sitting by the old box stove in Reid's store had given expression solemnly to something like: "The soul of man, which as a microcosmos resumes the nature of things, strives by self-abnegation, or self-annihilation, to attain this unspeakable reunion, which Eckhart calls being buried in God." I pictured what would have transpired. MacKay would have thumped the floor with his stick and exclaimed: "God, man! where did you come by that? Are you well, Bain?" Willie Watson would have pretended to get the drift of it, likening it to the phraseology of a dissertation on law by Taschereau. But it would soon be hushed, driven from cognizance by some one's complaint of how the coal strike had driven up the price of firewood a dollar a cord. Or Sweeny would tell gleefully how Bankes, the new milkman, had been done up by the simple farmers over his purchase of cows. How that, knowing that Bankes was coming to buy a certain day,

they had refrained from milking for twenty-four hours, with the result that the cows displayed great capacity for milk-giving.

I turned from this psychology trail to the more trodden literary thoroughfare of some late novels that, lying haphazard on a table, indicated perusal.

Bain had been opening some letters he had taken from his pocket.

"I have heard from three places," he said, resting his hand on the letters, "but there's not the slightest trace of Minister in those parts."

"It's a terrible mystery," I commented. But not wishing to follow this subject just then, I swung the trend of Bain's thoughts by asking: "Have you read this book, 'The Foolish Marriage,' and what do you think of it?"

"It's altogether weak and vicious. I don't know what the writer was after, unless it was just a salacious clamor to attract buyers for the book. Out in the world they seem just like we are here in the village; a story affecting the chastity of a woman will bring everyone on the run to listen. It just seems that with the tying on of the fig leaf, a simple function of nature becomes a sinful mystery, an engrossing theme for morbid tongues and minds. But while we here in the village whisper it, holding our heads close with a slight tribute to the indecency of it, writers such as that author blazon it forth, not hesitating to run their poisoned daggers into the already dead."

"But I've heard it contended, Malcolm, that such stories as this, depicting sin, are a beneficial lesson. I've always thought myself that the fearless utterances of the Bible in this way were efficacious. And the American classic, 'The

Scarlet Letter,'—that deals altogether with the seduction of a woman."

"There you're wrong, Cameron," Bain exclaimed; "it doesn't touch on the filthiness of the governing theme, it deals altogether with the act as a sin, the aftermath of remorse and repentance, and fear and punishment. That is just why it is a great book, and this one"—Bain thrust the "Marriage" from him as though it were carrion—"this is a wretched travesty upon the mental development. Physically and spiritually deteriorate beings gyrate through its fields, living in an unholy atmosphere of desire, and at the end the sinners, who have supplied their own temptations, come by less of God's wrath than falls to many a man that has led a life of hard-working usefulness. It's a dangerous book to put in the hands of any young woman or young man, for it's altogether of filthy desire; and 'The Scarlet Letter' is a Puritanical indorsement of the infallible punishment which follows sin—the most bitter retribution that can come to a man, the prolonged lashing of his own conscience. And you mentioned the Bible, Doctor, in the same breath with which you spoke of these modern decadent blueprints—where the woman taken in adultery was brought before Christ, and they were for stoning her. There was no extenuation offered, even by Christ—the lust of the flesh was not dragged up to be paraded in palliation. Christ looked down and wrote in the sands, then he said: 'Go and sin no more.' Isn't that the way to deal with this obnoxious subject, Doctor? She had sinned, according to Christ, because he said 'Sin no more'—a command. That's a filthy thing incinerated to toleration, if such a thing be possible. Just read Proverbs vii if you wish to learn how this sin

is treated with strength and with clean fearlessness and with literary beauty—read that, Doctor, and you'll never more be confused over the relationship which exists between these filthy books and the Bible."

Bain's gray eyes were luminous with earnest intensity; it was a new being bursting forth from his solemn holding.

"You've thought deeply on this subject, Bain," I said. "I must confess I was rather surprised to see these newer novels with you."

"Yes; there are others of the same ilk, showing the decadence of men in their gregarious existence. Satiated mental appetites they come by, that must be tickled by scorching cocktails of scribblers' brewing—the absinthe and the brandy and the vermouth and the tabasco of literature. There is 'Man and Superman' trying to prove God knows what. I think the author is as much mystified by his sophistry as any of us. He'll be like that commentator of Aquinas whom Carden speaks of as having wept in his old age because he could not understand his own works.

"All the big-heralded books that come to us from the hub of the world, London, just have their narratives revolving about the lifting of the fig leaf, as though there were nothing else of import in the world but the bestial, perverted sexual desires of men and women led out of healthy reasoning by just such constant expression of thought as these very books contain. And the pages are smeared over with glamourous attributes of silks and satins and jewels and wines, draping the hideous skeleton of this perpetual rutting which places man as the lowest of animals—for the others have their seasons, ordained by nature—until the young reader, standing on the threshold of life, with its many paths

leading into the future, sees the wrong trail, the one leading to destruction, rose-bordered, a gentle gradient, smooth of transverse, and hears voices more seductive than those that Odysseus waxed his companion's ears against. They're just horrible, these books. There's one, the most depraved thing in all literature, 'The Picture of Dorian Gray.' A brilliant, gifted man cast in that Sybaritic town, that is a thousand times worse than the old place on the banks of Tarantum, drew this sketch from the knowledge of his eye and his experience. I read these books because I want to know how the trend of thought is out in the world; they can't hurt me, but they make me sad; they reconcile me to the lesser sins of our people here. Books are grand companions when we take the upright man by the hand, and, following a strong line of his rugged contour, shape our own by it; and the profligates, the indecents, make us more charitable toward men of our own knowledge, whose shortcomings fade away to nothing in the fierce heinous light thrown by these sons of Ahab. But for the young and unthinking, the good books to build the character first, to the end that when they chance upon the other it will be seen in its own muck."

"The London life seems to engender a morbid taste for a literature of illicit motif," I offered; "thieves' tales or bull-necked parsons or 'My Lady Careless'—even in the theaters it is the same salacious seasoning—indeed the whole dish is of but putrid morals; but it is for themselves, and we here in Canada need not be affected by it."

"But we cannot escape its poisoned breath," Bain argued—"we are so very English here. It's a matter of faith with us to hold up our hand in horror at any evil report

from the States, and say in pity, as Hosea said of Ephraim, the Yankee 'is wedded to his idols, let him depart.' Also, we consider him like Ephraim again in being but 'an unturned cake' in the way of morals and culture and literature—so we cleave to the London faith for our reading, declaiming that we are patriots, empire sustainers. And the harm this vile picturing of English home life will do is incalculable. It will destroy all regard for the home people; it will offset much of the present endeavor to draw the people of Canada and the people of England into a closer relationship, a relationship which must depend altogether upon mutual regard, for it's useless to talk of regulating the bond of unity by treaty—official bargains, like other material deals, are sure to be broken when the profit becomes one-sided."

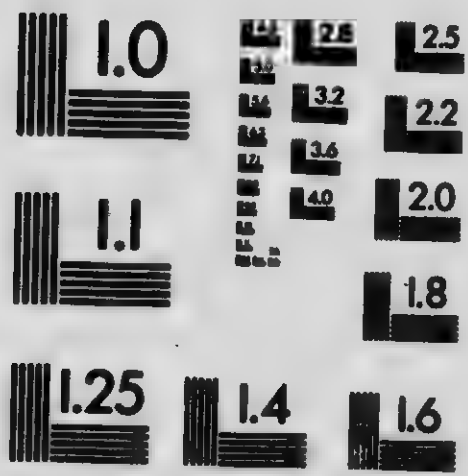
"Better the old books on the shelves, Malcolm," I suggested.

"Perhaps," he said inconclusively; "but the thunder of philosophy that is in them deadens the small voice of truth, I fear—the clatter of dishes more impressive than the food they carry. They've all bowed down to Bacon's 'Idola Forti'—the Idols of the Marketplace; standing words on their weak legs as the embodiment of nonexistent things. De Quincey divided literature into three parts; he might have pruned closer and carried it forward with two, as most things in creation are—*pro* and *con*, for and against, for God or against God, for good or for evil; the rest is but a subdivisional ramification of letters. There's a book," Malcolm said, indicating a volume of philosophic writings; "it holds nothing but derelicts bound in the floating weeds of uselessness. It is a Sargasso grave of floating sepulchers



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of silence, carrying the dead bodies of wrecked theories. In it we find page upon page of elaboration seeking to prove that the New Testament was not inspired because its literature is crude and barbarous; the writer holding that divine literature should be as pure as Plato's and eloquent as Cicero's. And against him is Warburton, proving that it was inspired because it *is* barbarous in expression. Just the Idols of the Marketplace—words. When shutting the door upon all this book wisdom, we may come out into the glorious sunshine, and the fields yielding sustenance to man, and flowers to gladden his heart; and not one of these philosophers could do what that lily you see through the window has done. A root delves in the black muck and brings up that beautiful form, always true to its delicate conception. All the Man philosophy in the world cannot create one simple thing such as that. It may blend and make hybrids, it may deviate these created things from their original paths, but it cannot create them."

"You should have been a writer of philosophy yourself, Malcolm," I hazarded. "It is marvelous that you should be content with this empty village life."

"I am content for want of a road to greater contentment."

"You were for the ministry at one time," I said.

"I soon found I wasn't fitted for it. I'd have made a poor servant—not to God; I think I could have labored for Him, but there are intermediate agents that will harass a man. I was afraid of the bit physical strength I have; I don't just realize its full extent when I'm roused. And I've seen occasions when not even the restriction of the Cloth would have kept my hands from the throat of some black-

guard; and perhaps, not knowing it, I might have held him till he was dead, and that for a minister—it would not do, I was afraid."

I knew well that what Malcolm said was simply a statement of the truth, for once in the village when two hulking brutes had insulted a girl, terrorizing the little constable till he was afraid to lay hands on them, Malcolm had throttled one so energetically that it was a question if he'd ever come to.

"But you're wasting great capabilities, Malcolm," I ventured; "you would have succeeded in almost anything."

"I might have made money that I don't need," he answered simply; "perhaps taken it from some one who requires it. That's the generally accepted idea of usefulness, the acquisition of worldly goods; men wreck their bodies and their souls over the laying up of stores they'll never use. One can't engage in any business nowadays without being at the throats of others, and them clutching at his. With a large capital I might have employed labor, with the laborer to revile me as a heartless capitalist grinding the last ounce of force from his body; and perhaps I might have come to look upon him as a treacherous, skulking ingrate; if I believed in him and trusted in him I should possibly find myself a bankrupt. As it is, I can do a little good now and then; having time to supervise these little matters, the bit money goes farther in the way of alleviation. As you're thinking, Doctor, it's just a curious little sidetrack in life that I'm following; not much of a goal at the farther end, but, in reality, just the same goal that awaits us all alike. 'The paths of glory lead but to the grave,' and a simple, truthful sticking to our own path is the greatest kind of glory."

From the hall came the heavy boom of a standing clock.

"Man alive—it's five o'clock!" Bain exclaimed; "I've gabbled for an hour. Will you have a cup of tea—Jennie is somewhere about and she'll draw it for us? After that I'll walk back to the village with you to let the sound of your voice take the din of my own from my ears."

As we walked back to the Hedge there was little talk from either of us, my mind subdued by the curious loosening up of Bain that cast me in a mood of reflection. What a strong factor in life he might have been had Jean unlocked that piano. And yet was he not altogether grand in his solitary breadth and honesty and beauty?

CHAPTER VI

NOW the days came in a procession. It is curious how, when one waits expectant, that a day which brings forth nothing of fulfillment seems a period of utter uselessness. A great sorrow narrows the vision.

Bain and others strove in vain to solve the mystery of the minister's going. There was absolutely no starting point to work from. Even the man who was supposed to have seen Minister at the railway station the day he disappeared destroyed the faint clew by now confessing that he was probably mistaken; he had since observed a stranger getting on and off the train several times whom he had undoubtedly taken for Neil Munro that morning. Minister often walked to the railway station for excrcise, so he might have been seen there that day, and yet not taken a train. He certainly had not bought a ticket, for the agent knew him well, and was positive upon this point.

One morning Bain came to the Hedge, his face carrying a cloud of depression. My heart jumped to my mouth; had he heard some awful news, learned some awful reality? His words relieved me.

"There is a scribe in town," he said. "The York *Times*

has sent one of its reporters, and the paper will be full of how you feed your hens, Doctor, and how the Scots are at one another's throats. There'll be a picture of the deserted wife, and dark hints of a woman in the case; or that Neil stole the contents of the plate. Man alive! I've a notion to take the matter in hand and souse yon gosling in the pond. He's the freshest wee bit mannie I've seen for many a day. He asked me if I thought it was a case of another minister gone wrong; and followed this up by saying—oh, the gosling!—that he'd heard hints of some lady in the choir, Miss Harkett—man, he had the name right enough—that there was suspicion of intimacy between Minister and little Teacher. Heavens! Doctor, if it hadn't been so laughable, I'd have smashed him. It was just the name that saved him —Miss Harkett. I saw through it at once; it was a fool's joke. There are men that would try to poke fun at the Lord, I think."

"Yes; just fancy! Teacher's name associated with that of any man is certainly droll."

"I think I know the beast that loaded the fool up with all this—Archie MacKillop; and it's not all just humor either, there's a touch of vitriol in it. I'll square matters with him some day, if he's not careful. Oh, but the boy scribe is going to have a wonderful story. I saw a headline on one of his notes, 'Mystery in the Ministry.' I thought I'd best warn you, Doctor; you might speak to Mrs. Munro and see if the Manse is all tight shut, for that inquisitive body might get round some of the elders that are against Neil, and make entry into the house."

"That would do him no good," I said.

"No, it wouldn't. There'll be no wrong there; but he'd

make evil of it sure—he'd invent something; and have a picture of Minister's study, or something to prove it. The liberty of the Press is a grand thing, Doctor."

"Well, I'll speak about it," I told Malcolm. And when he had gone I waited for Jean to appear. Waiting, Robert Craig came in. As I looked into his face I had a wish that the lacrosse season and the football and the other sports were done with for the year. The athletics that were devised for the physical betterment of the young men in his case had a detrimental effect; they led to too much good fellowship. Where some of the others could make one night of it and abstain for weeks, he couldn't. It just seemed useless to trouble over it though, for in the winter there would be dances and parties and holiday times—yes, it was hopeless.

Jean came out to where we sat just as my mind had struck this minor chord of despair, and I was glad of even the troublous question of locks and bolts.

I drew it very gently about the reporter, suggesting that I should go up and see if everything at the house were all right. Jean gave me the door key, and then another, smaller, saying: "This is the key of"—she hesitated, eliding her husband's name—"of the study. I just locked the door. I've been wanting to ask you before this, but hesitated, not wishing to trouble you too much, to bring me any letters or papers that might be on the desk—there were some, I remember."

"Give me the key, Doctor," Robert asked; "I'll run up—it won't take me a minute. You needn't bother—you have your writing."

"I don't mind in the least," I said, putting on my hat.

I was sure Jean's face had clouded when her brother had asked for the key.

"Well, I'll go with you," Robert declared.

When we entered the Manse the boy said: "Everything is all right here, just as it was when that Pharisee went away."

"Why do you call him that harsh name, Robert—he may be dead."

"He's not dead—why should you think of him as being dead?" The boy's voice was querulous and his face wore a petulant, nervous look; his mental disturbance seemed due to something of the present, rather than to past dissipation.

He repeated his question petulantly. "Have you or Malcolm heard anything that you are hiding—why do you say Munro is dead?"

"There is no trace of him living; a man doesn't suddenly melt into thin air."

"No, not even if he is dead—they'd find his body. They haven't; therefore he's alive, and will return—when he gets ready."

"He may have been murdered," I argued doggedly; "killed and his body hidden."

"Who would murder a penniless minister? And if they did, it would be small loss to anyone, least of all to Munro himself."

I laid my hands on the boy's arm—he had shocked me. I attributed his words to just a reckless, irritable frame of mind, the aftermath of dissipation; his nervous, sensitive temperament was subject to this uncontrollable mood after a drinking bout, I knew well.

"Don't be so bitter, Robert," I admonished; "you don't

mean what you say. I don't know why you have turned against Neil, and I don't want to, but I tell you this, boy—mind, I don't believe it will come to pass, but if Neil were found murdered, or even dead from his own hand anywhere about here, your idle words might stand forever against you. You know the trouble Phelan had to clear his name when his wife's body was found in the river. Indeed, to this day the gossips—and there are many of them in the village—shake their heads ominously when the subject is mentioned. It was proven that she committed suicide, but that doesn't still the evil tongues."

A look of fright came in the boy's eyes. He hadn't thought of the interpretation that might be put upon his careless words. I had no idea myself that it would ever come to this, and spoke more to bridle his tongue, for Neil's and Jean's sake—frighten him into silence, for he evidently had some sudden cause for antipathy to Munro.

"You're right, Doctor," he said, veering around to a mollified complacence. "But Munro is just in hiding some place and will be found—unless he makes away with himself."

"It's too grewsome; don't let's talk about it any more, Robert."

"Yes, it is. You might look at the back door, Doctor—see if it's fastened. Give me the key; I'll run up to the study. I know where Munro kept his papers; I'll take them all back to Jean."

A curious suspicion that the boy wanted to keep me from going to the study took possession of my mind. It was something in his eager nervousness, his insistence upon getting possession of the key, that bred this feeling.

"We'll go up together," I answered. "In dealing with another man's papers it removes the constrained feeling to have two present. Come on, we'll go up together."

As I opened the study door Robert stepped quickly past me. I saw him give Munro's desk a sweeping scrutiny.

"There are some letters, Doctor," he said; "tie them in a packet—here are some rubber bands."

As I gathered the loose papers I heard Robert nervously opening drawers, and a crackling noise as of a small lock being forced caused me to turn my eyes in time to see the boy slip something in his coat pocket. He caught my inquiring look, I fancy, for he said in an explanatory way, "Neil's photograph—Jean will want to have it."

"The very thing," I said; "we may use it in tracing Munro if he doesn't return soon."

I put the letters I had gathered in my pocket. Turning from the desk I noticed a paper on the floor that perhaps had fallen from the drawer Robert had opened. I stooped to pick it up, and as I did so an odor struck my nostrils with a force that arrested attention. It was an odor new to me, fiercely penetrating, sickening, its very radiating perfume suggesting evil.

Involuntarily as I picked the fallen paper from the floor I carried it to my nose. It, too, radiated that odor. It was an unpleasant smell; yet it aroused my curiosity.

"What's the matter, Doctor?" the boy asked. "Give me that paper. I'm going to burn these that are in the wastebasket in the grate."

He thrust his hand out eagerly for the sheet I held, and closed the half open drawer with a nervous movement.

"What's that odor?" I asked; "it's dreadful! I can imagine it a snake poison or somethin , vicious."

"I don't know—I haven't noticed anything," he answered.

Something in his voice caused me to look at him. His eyes struggled to hide a lie and his weak lips were trembling.

The odor once in my nostrils clung to me; it was like an evil spirit; like some indistinct devil in a nightmare.

A pair of Munro's gloves were lying on a chair by the desk. I picked them up and put them away in one of the drawers, noticing that they carried the same heavy odor. It now seemed to permeate the room. With an uncontrollable curiosity I carried pens, a paper knife, even a Bible to my nostrils—they were all possessed of this invisible spirit of repugnance. I saw the boy watching me with su ous, angry eyes.

"Are you acquiring Munro's scent so that you can trace him like a bloodhound?" he said presently in a sneering voice. "If you've got it, Doctor, we'll go."

I did not answer him. We locked the door behind us, and out in sunshine I drew a deep breath to wash from my lungs the horrible stench that was stifling.

It was curious how such a seemingly small thing took possession of me—I could think of nothing else. A hundred different perfumes of flowers and drugs and chemicals I summoned from memory, seeking in vain for a corresponding one.

Suddenly I remembered that Robert had exhibited no curiosity over this that had troubled me. Did he know what it was? If so, why had he offered no explanation? He must have been lying when he said he had not noticed it;

it would have asserted itself even to the dullest sense of smell.

My mind hardly carried a suspicion of anything in regard to Robert. That he knew something about Munro that the rest of us did not, was more than a suspicion; it was a certainty. I rehearsed the little scene in the Manse; Robert's nervous irritability when I spoke of Neil; his insistence that Neil was alive; his anxiety to go to the study alone; the surreptitious placing of the photograph in his pocket—yes, that was curious; it would have been so natural for anyone suddenly coming upon Neil's picture to have shown it, criticised it. Why did he wish me not to see it?

It was after Robert had left, going up to the tavern, that I suddenly fell to wondering if it really were a picture of Neil he had put in his pocket. A conviction forced itself upon me that it was not; something else—but what?

I passed into the house and asked Jean if she had got her husband's photo among the papers.

"No," she answered. "I think Neil never had one taken; he had a curious objection to it."

Evidently Robert's statement was untrue. What object was it that had been of so much importance that he felt called upon to deceive me? Not money, for with all his addiction to liquor, the boy was the soul of honor; it was bred in the Craig blood, nothing could eradicate that.

A sickening remembrance of Robert's face going white when I had spoken of how his words would be misconstrued if Neil were found dead came to me, and I strove to put it away. The boy simply had no nerves of reliability; they were weak, shattered, unstrung cords that vibrated treacherously to every little gust of unusuality. But what an

awful thing it would be if the reporter, with a desire for a thrilling story, should even hint at the possibility of foul play! Jean's brother was the last person known to have seen Munro, and their interview had ended in a fierce quarrel.

My God! I might be called upon, forced, to give as circumstantial evidence the vague impressions that were now in my mind.

I was gloomed, morbid. I rushed into the sunlight. I called Blitz, and strode away for miles over the hills, and filled my lungs with the glorious breath of the hay fields and pine woods and quickened my blood to a healthier thought.

When I returned I found that the reporter had been to the Hedge. With professional insistence he had succeeded in interviewing Jean; but her quiet sense had stood her in good stead.

Minister Munro had gone away for a little rest, that was all he could glean from Jean.

After all I was glad I had not been at home. Perhaps my anger at his intrusion would have caused him to retaliate unpleasantly in his account of the mystery.

The next evening the York *Times* contained the reporter's version of "A Mystery in the Ministry." The report itself was a remarkable contribution to literature, an exasperating *pot pourri* of facts and fancies. Fortunately for the good name of Iona the writer was safe in York; the villagers would certainly have slain him—they would have tossed him gladly into the pond, at least.

For twenty years a small coterie of villagers had gathered nightly in Hugh Reid's grocery store for converse. It

was a dull evening, drawn blank, when nothing but politics and the weather were served up. Some one of the half dozen seated around the square box stove was sure to have a subject of wondrous interest. Winter or summer the stove was there, and the same seats; two sugar barrels, for the brown and the white, a couple of loose boxes ready to be pulled up, the little table, on the farther end of which were the ham and bacon on cut, and two chairs. These seats filled, other attendants stood.

Ever since the disappearance of Minister and the taking of the Skipper these subjects had been almost the sole topics, and this night the caucus was nicely under way when Willie Watson, the Town Clerk, appeared with a copy of the York *Evening Times* in his hand, and the pleasing possession of something new in his mind.

His quasi legal profession had inculcated in Willie a love for dramatic effect. He knew what was in the paper, and he also noted that none of the others had come by their copies yet.

The papers came by the evening train, and Willie had sapiently waited at the newsdealer's for his *Times*, having used his cross-examining faculty to draw from the reporter the information that his report would be in that issue. Watson had glanced hastily through the daily and then hurried to the gathering of the gossips.

Teamster Dick Sweeny was saying: "Well, b'ys, yon detective that they've put on the Minister's track has got something up his sleeve, mark my words. I had a drink with him at the tavern."

"What does he think of the case, Dick?" asked Duncan Anderson, the Insurance Agent.

"That's what I asked him myself, Dunc, an' he just looked wise at me."

"That rooster's got a sharp eye in his head," Anderson commented.

"He's got a still tongue, b'ys," Sweeny added. "Just the same, he thinks there's something back of all this."

"What came of yon newspaper fellow? I ain't seen nothin' of his in the *Times*?" queried Dugald MacFarlane. "He got hold of a story here that the Minister had eloped with the organist."

Everybody laughed; it was an incongruous picture.

"Say, b'ys," said Sweeny, "I'll bet she'd swat a man quick that would go for to kiss her. Faith, she'd run a mile if a feller winked at her."

"She's a sweet little body all the same," declared MacFarlane.

"Faith, I'll tell you what I think about it, b'ys," continued Sweeny. "Munro was a little off his base. He shut himself up with books an' writin' an' sermons an' prayin' till he got sick. If he'd gone to the bush an' chopped a cord of wood every day, he wouldn't of looked so ganted up an' blue about the gills. I mind myself the winter I was watchman at the factory here. I hadn't a thing to do but eat. Say, b'ys, I was goin' queer in the nut. I've seen me go out on the road in the moonlight an' chase a shadow for a mile. S'help me, God! b'ys, that's no lie, I did for a week straight on end. I could see the thing ahead of me on the snow, an' what d'ye s'pose it was—a string on the peak of me cap. If anyone banged a door I'd jump a foot in the air. I took patent medicines till I had a drug store inside me. Say, b'ys, I was drug pow-

ders to there. S'help me, God! I was"; and the speaker narked off with a hand the first button from the bottom of his vest. "I was iron pills and tonic washes to there"; his hand rose a button. "There was salts an' sennie an' herb teas to there"; his hand caught the commencement of a faded green tie at this. "An' just at the bottom of me throat I could taste the goldashest bitter stuff that Mother Kelly swore by—she give me a big bottle av it. I was full up, as I say, of medicals, and me chewin' gum to beat the band all the time. I got that weak, be-gob—I couldn't lift me ax, and thin I found all the cure I needed was more liftin' of the same. Work—work—that's what done it—ax-handle oil."

"It's all here in the *Times*," interrupted Willie, and drawing from his pocket the paper he tapped it dramatically with a finger.

"What's there, Watson?" queried MacKay.

"The reason for the disappearance of Minister."

"Read it, man, read it; let's hear what yon gosling's got to say," cried MacFarlane.

Watson took off his hat, smoothed his gray hair back with one hand, took a drink of water from the pitcher that was always on the counter, stared over the top of his glasses critically at his audience, and then read the daily-expected write up. There was a headline worded "Dissension in the Church."

"I wasna aware of any trouble myself," said MacFarlane. "I'm thinkin' yon lad was a bit o' a liar."

"Oh, we hae perfect harmony," declared MacKay, winking at Sweeny.

"'The Minister was a temperance man,'" read Watson,

" ' and some of the church elders thought he was too personal in denouncing the drink from the pulpit.' "

" That's expleecit," commented MacKay. " That brings it doon to five individuals, including three that're present."

" The Minister or no other man ever saw me the worse of liquor," declared Anderson hotly. He was an elder.

" I take a drop meself," said farmer John MacRae, " but I'm no a drunkard. An' if I had yon scraggy runt of a writer here I'd treat him to something stronger than whisky." He was also an elder.

" That's your Tory paper, MacKay, with its policy of slander," sneered MacFarlane.

At this juncture Malcolm Bain came into the store for a purchase, but there was a barricade wall of flour bags that hid him from the group around the stove and they were not aware of his presence.

Watson was reading in a monotonous voice some interesting generalities when he suddenly stopped and said: " Listen, MacKay—you'll enjoy this, I know."

Then he read:

" ' One of the church members is an enthusiastic disciple of Izaak Walton. He is also a Government official. One Sabbath the Rev. Munro preached against the disregard of the sanctity of the day of rest, intimating that some of his congregation were given to casting a line in the brook instead of listening to God's word in the kirk. The pew of the official spoken of was empty that day, and it was whispered that the Minister's remarks were leveled at him.' "

Watson lowered the paper and looked over his glasses mournfully. The two angry elders smiled, and MacRae coughed suggestively. MacKay stared in blank amazement.

"Of a' the liars! I've never strung a rod in my life on the Sabbath. Some one in Iona has just loaded yon gosling up out of spite. If I kenned the fool I'd bash him."

"You're right, Donald," commended MacKillop. "There's one man in Iona that would just like to see a split in the church. Perhaps you know who I mean?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, who would have an object in throwin' the blame of the Minister's goin' on the congregation?"

To their credit no one took up the insinuation.

"A man doesn't leave his home because of trouble in his business, often; it's generally because there's something wrong in the home," continued MacKillop significantly. "As Sweeny said, that detective knows something behind the scenes. Now, who's been hintin' at this same thing that's in the paper that some of the congregation was against Minister Munro and wanted to get rid of him; and who was like to make trouble in the Minister's family? You all know who I mean."

As though the speaker's strong allusion had conjured up the embodied principal, Malcolm Bain stood before their astonished eyes. His tall figure loomed gigantically above the sitters, his square rugged face was like a bronze mask —it was terrifying in its power of control, for he must have known that it was he whom MacKillop meant.

Watson shoved the paper nervously in his pocket. There was a minute's silence, apprehensive, trying to the nerves. And all the time Bain's eyes were fastened enigmatically upon the dark, dissipated face of MacKillop.

"You were saying, MacKillop, that some one was making trouble in the church—were you meaning me?"

"I mentioned no names."

"You ought to. A slander is worse if the slanderer is too cowardly to give the other man a chance to defend himself. If you were meaning me I'm just sorry for you, for though I don't like to mention it, I've helped you many a time. And I'm not trying to split the Church—I'm trying to keep it together. You did slander a man and mention his name, but that's just as bad, for he's not here to defend himself. And he helped you, too. He picked you out of the gutter and tried to make a man of you—and you hated him for it. I'm meaning Minister Munro. But worse than all this, you hinted slander at a good woman—as good as God ever put the breath of life in."

As he said this, Malcolm walked to the back door of the store and opened it.

MacKillop drew a breath of relief; he thought Bain was leaving. But Malcolm came back to the stove and continued: "Ye're not fit to be sitting here with gentlemen. Gossip's one thing, but slander's another; and slandering a woman should be punished. So now I'm going to put you out among the pigs in the back yard—your own kind, you can fraternize with them."

Bain swung his long arm with wonderful rapidity and seized MacKillop by the collar. The latter was a strong man, too, with a reputation for barroom fighting. As he struck at Bain he was twisted sidewise, and another hand that was like a bear's paw seized him by the roomy part of his breeches; he was lifted to his toes, propelled swiftly through the door, down three steps, then lifted bodily, and canted over the low fence of a pig pen.

MacKillop fell sprawling among the porkers, the mire smothering his curses.

Malcolm Bain came into the store, closing the door behind him, saying: "Friends, now that yon liar has gone, I just want to say that as we call ourselves men it's put to us to protect the Church and the name of our Minister, who was a good man, and the woman who has now come by sorrow enough. I think I'll be going. Good night, everybody."

"Say, b'ys," ejaculated Sweeny, when the door had closed behind Bain, "that was as well done as ever I see in me life. That's what they call 'buffaloin'' a man out west."

"In college we called it the grand bounce," commented MacFarlane.

"Well," said Storekeeper Reid, coming from behind the counter, "it served MacKillop right. A man has no business to drag a woman's name into any discussion. There's been too much talk over this church business anyway."

"Hivins! but that was a surprise party to MacKillop," cried Sweeny enthusiastically. "Say, b'ys, when Bain grabbed Archie it just put me in mind of what happened to Bert Mullen yisterday up on the farm. You know what Bert's like. Well, we was comin' up from the bush, me an' Bert, an' just as we rounds the drive shed there was a two-year-old mooly heifer sound asleep standin' up in the shade. Says Bert, 'Watch me give the mooley a surprise, Dick.' Say, b'ys, he just walked up to her, cunnin' like, as though he was goin' to steal a bag of oats. When he gets close he hauls off with his big fist an' gives her wan in the ribs. Say, b'ys, I never see anythin' so quick in me

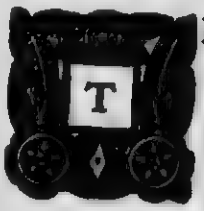
life. I guess the ould heifer'd been dreamin'. She whips round, rippin' a bellow out of her that'd put yer hair on end, an' ketches Bert in the ribs with her bunty head that was like an iron pot, an' lands him on his back in a mud puddle a foot deep. Hivins! I rolls on the ground yellin'—S'help me God! if Bert'd been killed I couldn't a' helped it. When Mullen come out o' the mud hole he rips an oath outen him an' says, 'Dick, don't never strike a sleepin' cow.' 'I won't,' says I. 'Neither will I again,' says he."

"I wonder that Archie didn't come back at Bain when he clim' out of the pig sty," remarked MacFarlane.

"I'm thinkin' he had needs to go home to dress first," suggested MacKay. "And yon's where I'm going, too; I'm awa' home. Who's going my way?"

"Archie'll play Malcolm a dirty trick yet for to-night's work, mark my words, men," Watson added. "He's got an Indian streak in him, has Archie. I don't say there's any truth in it, but he's got the face of an Indian, and he's as mean as any redskin."

CHAPTER VII



HE day after the affair at the grocery, Malcolm Bain came to the Hedge, his ostensible errand flowers for the Memsahib.

"It's the safest place to carry them," he said, as he carefully removed his stiff black hat, and brought forth a bunch of great cat-faced pansies.

"I brought them for the good wife, Doctor. She was saying she had no luck with her pansies this year, and over at my place they just grow like weeds." He added, apologetically, lest I should make too much of the obligation, "They don't come to much unless they're thinned out, and I dislike throwing them away. We're all too prone to hoard the pennies when we have more than enough of them and trample under foot the beautiful things the Creator has taken so much trouble to please us with. A love for the beautiful and depravity seldom home in the same man."

"Seldom," I concurred. "In fact, any love possessed by a man must keep him in the better way."

"Yes, Doctor, many wise men have left us deathless passages preaching the beautiful. 'Wee modest crimson-tipped flow'r.' Think of the poet's heart with his lament over crushing its bonnie stem. The whole wide expanse

of human sympathy laid bare to our sight by the picture of a tiny flower. But speaking of the seeing eye, Doctor—" a change in Malcolm's voice, a harder ring in it, told me that he had suddenly locked up the things of beauty—" did you notice in the paper about an unknown man being found in the Niagara, at Queenstown? Well, it gave me a bad start, but it wasn't Minister. And, Cameron, speaking of the papers, do you take the *Times*?"

"No; the *News*."

"Well, keep an eye for yesterday's *Times*—don't let it come in. That daft junior smeared a page of clean paper with ooze, and it's just fair criminal. What makes it worse, the idiot got a smattering of truth into it. Aye, the truth used as a plaything, or for evil purpose, is sometimes worse than a lie."

"I'll take care that Jean doesn't see it."

"There's another thing you might keep an eye to. Over this same matter there was an unfortunate discussion at the store last night. The usual lot were there—you know them."

"Yes, I heard all about it, Malcolm."

Bain started; a shamed look came into his face. "How did you come to know of it, Doctor? You weren't there."

"No; but I had it all from one who was. And you did just right. The Church and Jean and myself are all very much obliged to you."

"I'm glad of that," Malcolm answered simply; "I fair lost my temper, I fear. But a village that gives way to idle gossip is in a far worse state than if it held fighting tournaments every day in the park. Backbiting is worse than black eyes—it leaves nastier scars; scars on men's

souls. The ruction at the store may check the men's talk a bit, but you can't stop the wag of women's tongues; it's as difficult to keep them out of scandal mischief as geese from young grain fields. They're the same—a fence'll not hold them. If you'll speak to Mrs. Cameron she'll warn off the old wife gossips when they call."

"I'll do it, Bain, though I think she would have been before either of us in that."

"Will it be too great a favor if I ask you to give the supply minister a bite of dinner to-morrow. I've arranged for Dr. MacLean from York to take the service. He's of Knox and has influence, you see."

"I understand. I'll be glad to have him with us."

"He'll be meeting Mrs. Munro and it'll not do harm either side. I don't want the other party to get hold of him. He'll be stopping with me, but my bachelor dinner would be poor cheer for him."

"You'll come to dinner, too, Malcolm?"

"No, thank you; I've got to be home. It's a lovely day, isn't it," he added, which I knew meant that his mission was ended.

"It's very hot," I objected.

"True, it is a bit warmish, but the heat'll harden up the wheat berry; aye, and we'll have three days of it. The wind blew from the southwest last night till twelve and this morning the barometer rose a point. Three days of this dry heat'll make the wheat grade A1; it'll put five cents a bushel on, at least. The farmers have much to be thankful for in these parts. Well, I'll be going. I'll just bring Dr. MacLean over after service. Perhaps you'll be at church yourself."

Bain fumbled a little over closing the gate, looked thoughtfully up the street, and then critically at the sky. I knew there was something still on his mind, but I couldn't help him out with a lead.

"How is Jean bearing up through it all?" he suddenly asked.

"With the highest type of bravery, silently," I answered; "perhaps her suffering is too acute for words, it may be that."

"Just tell her we'll find him. Good day to you, Cameron."

Bain's advice appeared to me to be unwise. Jean's character was too strong, or perhaps too deeply grounded in simple faith, to need the bolstering up of problematical premises; but his words revealed exactly Bain's position, his point of view.

There was no doubt that he was deeply in love with Jean; also that he had glorified his passion till it was like the love of a brother, holy in its unselfishness, in the absolute absence of physical influence. It was like some precious metal, gold incinerated to purity. Malcolm's powerful frame, his almost dour Scotch face, the massive head so stolidly fixed on heavy shoulders, suggested so little a tabernacle in which homed this beautiful spirit of chivalrous love. The magnetism of his strong nature always remained with me after he had gone and now I continued stroking the muscles, mental and physical, of the idol. A fine nature, Bain's, I called from one side of my mind to the other; intensely human, thoughtful beyond count, yet liable to misjudgment through indifference to diplomacy.

I threw off the alluring spell of character analysis by tossing my voice up the stairway:

"Allis! are you there, Memsahib? Doctor MacLean is to have dinner with us to-morrow," I announced, as her head appeared over the upper banister; "he's the Supply."

"What!—th 'Dear Old Gentleman'! I'm so glad!"

This simple p. sure brought her lightly downstairs. We had grown into the habit of short-range communication since the advent of Jean; far-carrying voices might cause a twinge of painful remembrance.

"Doctor MacLean, of all men, will be most welcome," Memsahib said, now at my shoulder; "he's just the sweetest Christian that ever breathed. That's why he's the 'Dear Old Gentleman' to everyone. If anybody can give Jean spiritual solace, he can. It's Malcolm's arranging, isn't it, husband?"

"Yes."

"I knew it."

Then I thought of Bain's flower tribute, forgotten, in my hand.

"And he brought these pansies—for you he said."

"Oh! the duplicity, the delicacy of that huge creature! they're for Jean—from me, of course; I'll give them to her."

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT was it this Sabbath morning—why did the Hedge atmosphere vibrate with intense currents?

Scarce eye-open, I was hurried into active consciousness—to the essay of recalcitrant stiff-necked linen. But first the decorous shave; haste was written large upon the usually dawdling day of rest. The "Dear Old Gentleman" had prematurely invaded my household in spirit—esoterically projected by his fame.

Gracious! sleep had obliterated his immaculate excellence from my mind. But the Memsahib held her Aladdin lamp to my eyes, and I saw as she saw. Indeed, I was to attend service! Unuttered died my objection, and I donned black and linen as blithely as though the churchgoing had been my own intent.

Little feet pattered from room to room—to the bathroom, where five pairs of shoes glistened in ebony blackness, waiting to be transferred to their proper hiding beneath pews. White dresses crackled and rustled as little figures brushed through doorways, or galloped upstairs and downstairs.

The Hedge would contribute royally to the Dear Old Gentleman's convening that Sabbath.

At last we filled the hall and poured out to the walk. Ungraciously I whispered to Doo-doo, "Isn't Mother like the Plymouth Rock hen with her chicks?"

"Oh, Father!" and Doo-doo's reproof gurgled drowningly in bubbling waters of laughter.

The street was fogged with the dust of farm vehicles. Doctor MacLean's name was a shibboleth to test even the reluctance of an agnostic. The old kirk swallowed up a stream of humanity till I wondered where they would all find sittings.

The Memsahib had used as a whip to my sluggish zeal the promise of a fine sermon; and when the simple, gentle-faced minister took us all to his heart in the pulpit, and reached us closer to God, I fell to wondering wherein lay the strange alchemy that, dispensing with eloquent rhetoric, suffused the temple with the whispering spirit of Christ. It was all about Christ and Toleration—thoughts of such boundless width that we floated in a sea of communism. No making a combative stand upon points of debatable theology; our questioning mentality rested in Nirvana; our hearts softened and dominated our selfish selfism, until, casting a truant eye about, I saw all the rugged Celtic faces soft, like the faces of the shepherds in the memorial window. It was the window, perhaps, with its subduing light, I reasoned. Certainly it was the face of the Madonna that stabbed me with a poignant regret that Jean sat yonder under the lilac hedge, alone, save for the companionship of her sorrow.

Presently I was transfixed by words. Before, it had been all a subtle spirit of Christian sincerity. Ah! that was it—that was the compelling force, sincerity. The Minister was

asking of the congregation a continuance in unity, a massing of Christlike endeavor, when, like a line from an anthem, came, in his gentle voice: "I would ask of you all as Christians a cherishing love for our sister of the lone furrow—the wife of your pastor."

The exquisite beauty of this destroyed me as a reasonable sitter in a pew. My brain surged with a strange turmoil of disjointed thoughts—words without correlative connecting links.

It was something nebulous—that God, and simplicity, and inspiration and beauty of thought were one and the same thing. These words pushed each other back and forth until my head throbbed; I could have grasped the little thin-haired old man of the pulpit in my arms, and carried him in joy to some high throne that was a seat of the mighty.

But presently Memsahib's hand was on my arm—I am afraid she thought I was asleep—and she was drawing me to a knowledge of observances that, with the words of beauty in my mind, meant little.

We were soon in the open. I had the Doctor tucked under my arm—I could love him now without pretense—and we were ebb-tiding back to the Hedge. Not, however, until Dr. MacLean had held levee on the greensward platform, that like a rich woof of velvet carpeted the earth beneath our tread, even enfolding with its warmth the cold stone feet of the kirk.

Calvinistic faces, moulded hard by their owners' lives so indissolubly wedded to toil, carrying the toil-endeavor even into their religion, lost much of their austerity as they grouped about the little gray preacher. Indeed, very proudly

I marched off with our guest, followed by looks of pardonable envy.

And the Doctor, pulsating with human feeling, left his mantle of theology flung against the kirk walls—figuratively, of course—and said: "My, my! Dear me, Doctor Cameron, what a lovely thing to have all these little girls. My, my! Look at the sunlight on their white dresses; just a sweet picture. If God had nothing else to give us but such gifts we ought to think well of Him, indeed we should."

That wasn't theology—not at all; it was just the joyous boy's mind in the silver-haired dome.

I was thinking that the Scots would indeed be stiff of neck if they did not bear patiently the yoke of casual ministers for a little, after listening to the Doctor's words impregnate with resignation to the will of God.

As we sat behind the lilacs in the little interval between service and dinner, I found myself constantly gazing with puzzled wonderment upon this quaint old-fashioned man who had thrilled me with his gentle sincerity. Sitting there, rocking nervously in a low chair, his body had shrunken from the commanding aspect carried in the pulpit. There, also, the face had been luminous with magnetic power; behind him the choir had appeared just blotches of color against the somber-toned organ; now the face was plain, perhaps sweet in its symmetry of plainness. The eyes carried no fire, just trusting content; looking at me they seemed to say: "We both, not meaning any evil, say this or think that." Gazing into them I noticed there was a feeling of mutual confidence. That he was fussy did not irritate in the least.

Then there was the dinner. And, lo! suddenly, as if by

chance, the Doctor, the Dear Old Gentleman, was talking of my book—had read it. Indeed, he was a wonderful little man!

And he came over a part that I had toiled at to the extent that I had well-nigh buried the real issue, for none of the critics had noticed it at all. At the lower end of the table I could see the Memsahib's eyes luminous in appreciation of his words; I feared she would rise and put her arms around his neck.

But after dinner she exploded a bomb under my castle of conceit, knocking at least a turret into mortar.

"Wasn't it thoughtful of Dr. MacLean," she said, "to keep the talk going about your book, and those curious infidels in China, so that there'd be nothing said of the church here to worry Jean."

"I thought he was really interested in my story of the Minister among the Indians," I answered somewhat stiffly—"he must have been, to have read it before he knew us—before he came out here."

"Of course he is interested—everybody is; I mean everybody who has read the book," she answered.

"Dear me, how lovely! this simple life—yes, yes!" thus Dr. MacLean expressed his boyish satisfaction, as we traveled from the hot interior to the land dominated by the hammock.

Three soft maples standing on guard up and down their beat of my frontage fought back the hot slanting rays of the afternoon sun, and with the screen of their broad leaves veiled the dust that swirled up from the roadbed and sought to leap our hedge. In barter for the sunlight they threw across the lawn a cool shade.

We almost laid hands upon our guest to get him in the hammock. "The ladies—dear me, the ladies, by all means; Mrs. Munro, or you, Mrs. Cameron—a little rest." But finally he yielded.

"You were asking about the hardships in China, Doctor Cameron," he began.

I hadn't asked; but that was a mere bagatelle, so I nodded as encouragement to the Reverend's story.

"One of our missionaries," he continued, "the Reverend Philpot, was lost for—dear me, how long was it?—three, five, yes, six months. Of course, we had given him up for dead, sorrowed for him greatly—he was a most conscientious worker; we had dispatched a missionary to take his place, when one day I received a cablegram that he had been found, restored to us by the grace of God. I haven't the particulars yet, it was quite lately, and we don't know whether he got lost, or wandered away, or was captured by the Boxers and held for ransom."

"It must have been a relief to you," I said.

"Indeed, it was—a blessed relief. It shows we should never lose hope—just live in faith until—well, until all hope is gone. Of course, all hope is never gone, because at best it is only change, a happy change."

What a deep little old man it is, I thought, as I began to realize the sentiment that had prompted him to say, "You were asking of China."

"Doctor," put in Malcolm Bain suddenly, who with the Agnostic, had joined our little party, "do you remember that you are to have tea with Mrs. MacFarlane?"

"Dear me, dear me! thank you, Mr. Bain. I had forgotten it. Dreadful, inexcusable! I must go."

Such a bustling departure the Doctor had, fearing he would not be in time. It was not yet five, but the Dear Old Gentleman quite forgot to look at his watch, accepting Bain's suggestion that he would be late.

"A Disciple of Christ," the Agnostic said with abrupt brevity, watching the quaint figure in black that seemed top-heavy beneath the tall silk hat. "Faith like his is worth having."

"But it's very common here," declared Bain. "I mean the belief. I'm not saying that its obligations are carried out as conscientiously as in Dr. MacLean's case. You don't go to the kirk, at least you haven't for some time, or you'd see sitting up there in the front pews—let me see, well, a dozen gray-haired men, with stooped shoulders, that have worked hard for fifty, or sixty, aye, even seventy years some of them, and the joy of life has pretty well leaked out toward the end of all those years. So if it weren't for this religion—My God, man! it would be awful to think of the desolation, wouldn't it? I've looked in their faces many times—they're honest faces as the world goes—and there's no trace of despair; they're as content as we are. Man, do you mean to say there's nothing in all that?"

"Bain, you're as honest in your convictions as the good Doctor who has just left us. I like to argue this question with men I suspect don't believe what they preach. Over the way," and the Agnostic nodded toward the church, "there'll be men to-night with their heads bowed to the prayer, and in their hearts an evil hope that Munro, who was as good a Christian as the Doctor, may never come back—and just because he let them see that they were hypocrites. They would deceive themselves if they were

left alone, but he wouldn't leave them alone, he was trying to save them from themselves."

I had a strong suspicion that the Agnostic was still trying to convince himself, unsuccessfully, that the faith he had imbibed at his mother's knee, that had been his God-fearing ancestors' before him, was a chimerical nothing. Apart from this divergence, he was altogether a lovable man; as his criticism of the Doctor indicated, of a fair-minded disposition. But, unfortunately, he was tenacious of argument. This I think was an exemplification of the statement "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do."

He was a retired official, having seen service in India. Voluble enough over some things, he was rather reticent about his own early life. This I put down to the English insular diffidence toward discussing personal affairs. I was certain he could have nothing to hide, nothing prejudicial. Indeed, perhaps, he was not even English born; his tongue was cosmopolitan to a degree, that is an English-tongued *Cosmopolii.* His idioms had a range from Oxford to Calcutta, loitering on the return journey in New York, with a large sweep of Canada.

It was difficult to place him by his speech, or accent, or lack of it. Many would have thought him a Canadian; indeed, he may have been drafted from the Kingston Military School to the British service, or, born in Canada, dribbled through the schools in England and turned out a griffin with a billet in India.

He had acquired a vast fund of information upon general topics, and drew upon his store at times for most convincing similes, or examples. Why he had come to our village probably to spend the remainder of his days was

not clear to me. Perhaps he had some socialistic antagonism to the British *Raj*; perhaps it had not used him quite fairly in the way of promotion.

I conjectured that his agnosticism—it was only that because of a more relative word—was more or less a form of mind exercise, like playing solitaire. Had he retired to England he would have had his whist at the Club—delightful solace of the superannuated—a frock-coat stroll in Hyde Park and Piccadilly; and that recurrent theme for desultory conversation—the fogs.

Perhaps he had simply come to Canada to find a home where his slender stipend—he never sought to conceal the fact that his means were limited—would be sufficient for a good healthy life, good food, books, and the smell of the fields.

Iona, seen from the railway station, its homes nestling like gray- and red-wooled sheep in the valley and up the undulating hills, was very like an English hamlet, and perhaps the Agnostic had thus discovered it from the window of a train. At any rate, here he was, and I, for one, was pleased to have him as a neighbor.

Possibly even it were better for him to mentalize over these problems of creation, and futurity, and the present well-being of humanity than to fritter away the balance of his time with whist and frock coats and execration of the fogs. If he liked the simple it was certainly good for him.

I congratulated myself that the mental storm had passed when the Major resumed: "From where I sit I can count four church spires, which means four bodies of sane people set against each other in the matter of their common good.

And the same thing subdivisionally exists beneath each spire. Across the way most uncharitable stories are going the rounds to account for Munro's disappearance."

"Don't listen to them, man, they're quite untrue," said Malcolm.

"Where was Munro in the ministry before he came to Iona, Bain? Have you thought to inquire in that parish; he might have gone back there for a rest. If he were suffering from aberration brought on by overwork and despondency he might drift back there by a sort of instinct."

"It would be a long journey, Major—India."

"Was he there—as a missionary?"

"Aye; and a good one, too; a martyr all but the final journey with the Silent Boatman—he was stationed somewhere in Central India."

"That's the whole thing then," cried the Major eagerly; "I'll wager a guinea he got a touch of sun; and once touched always touched—I think something melts in the gray matter, for a man is never the same again, liable to go off at a tangent at any moment. By Jove! we had a hot spell just before he disappeared. Now we *have* got a clew. Their devilish dark hints about other things are all moonshine; Munro was a bit dotty owing to the sun."

"It might be so," Malcolm admitted slowly. "There was a famine in his district the year he came home, and he just slaved to save his people, and sapped his constitution for the benighted."

"And now his reputation is sapped by the benighted here. I admit that I wasn't in love with the missionaries when I was in India; some of them were so zealous that it just kept the officials busy keeping things straight. A man

would be taken from the plow in America, rushed through a superficial course in theology, and sent out there inspired by the idea that he had ignorant, crude savages to teach. Lord bless me! he would go up against men that these questions had been torturing for fifty generations back—heritage, you know—and they would look upon the missionary as crude, a novice, a false doctor who had come among them to destroy a belief, or a faith of generations, and then, when he had shattered everything they had ever believed in, destroyed their faith, would ask them to accept, on his assertion, a new dogma. To my mind it's a dangerous thing. Smash a man's faith and it is difficult to get him to hold to anything after that, new or old. I'm not saying that Brahmanism or Buddhism are true gospels; in fact, they are founded on wrong principles, Brahmanism particularly, for it is grounded on fear. Siva, the Destroyer, and his horrible consort, Kali, are fearful embodiments. The religion of Christ is far more potent to elevate humanity. But these students of theology, the Brahmans, were keen analyzers, dissectors of doctrines, and they could find in the Christian religion with its 'eye for an eye, and tooth for a tooth,' and the wrath of God, much to liken to the very things the missionary denounced. When he innocently enough declaimed against the Hindoo's reverence for the cow, he attacked an ordinance that had been enacted in great wisdom. The Brahmans knew that and laughed at him. In times of extensive famine—and famines were but nature's way of preserving the balance in earth's creatures—those who were dying of starvation, after they had eaten whatever grain there was, would have swept from the land the cattle. Then when a time of growth came, the stronger ones that

had survived would have had no means of tilling the soil. It would have been perpetual starvation until all were extinct. Nothing but deifying the cow, and the sacred bull, of course, would have kept the knife from their throats. The fear of eternal punishment for this sacrilege was greater than the fear of a temporary death. But I'm preaching, lecturing; it's a tremendous subject. And ignorance of all these things is what blunts the sword of Jehovah in the hands of inexperienced babes."

"But Munro was a man of wide knowledge and broad," contended Bain.

"He was," assented the Agnostic. "And perhaps where he seemed narrow, bitter, nailing the sin of intemperance like they nailed the thieves to the cross, may have been due to just this very Eastern experience, comparing the laxity in regard to drink among the church members with the abstemious habits of the Mohammedans and the Buddhists. I've traveled myself among the Beluchis and the Afghans, and they, as a body, shun spirits as a Protestant does Holy Water. Perhaps Munro wished to sustain the Christian religion on a higher plane than these faiths we look upon as Pagan. Anyway he wore himself out here over the famine of Christ's manna as he did in India, and broke himself down."

"And of more import than the cause of his going is that he has gone and we have [illegible] trace of him," said Malcolm.

"But I have heard dark hints of foul play"; the Agnostic said this with an unconscious lift to his voice, as though the remembrance had suddenly flashed upon him.

Before Malcolm could express his ridicule of such an

idle report, Robert Craig's voice broke in upon us from almost at my elbow.

His boyish face peered at us from over the gate, the lilacs hiding him until he leaned forward.

He had heard the Agnostic's words for he said: "You are like three black crows sitting on a tree.—Croak, croak, croak!"

He swung open the gate and took my chair which I had vacated for a seat on the bench.

"We were just talking over plans for tracing Neil," Malcolm explained; and I understood this as a hint for us to eliminate the general discussion of Munro in Robert's presence.

"And just now you're busy over some old woman's yarn that he's been murdered, like the prince in the fairy tale, eh?"

"We're not listening to such idle, foolish gossip, *boy*," Malcolm answered, most of his reproof centered on the inflection he put upon the word "boy."

Then by chance the Agnostic startled me with a simple question: "Have you sent to the papers a picture of Minister Munro? That's one of the most effective methods of finding a lost man."

"That's just where we're hampered the most; there's not a photograph of Minister to be had. I was wanting one, but Mrs. Munro says her husband never had one taken; he had a curious objection to it," Bain answered.

Hanging on Malcolm's words, I was watching Robert's face, for his curious conduct in the Manse study came back to me disquietingly. I caught his eye once in a furtive, frightened look; I was sure his face grew pale. Now is his

opportunity, I thought; if he does not offer the photograph his explanation to me that day was all a lie. I sat silent, waiting. He did not speak. I had a chance to either convict or clear him of deception by referring to the photograph he claimed to have discovered, but I just thought of what trouble a word might lead to, and desisted.

Besides, in my mind he was already convicted of inexplicable deceit. And there was that other terrible, unexplainable dread engendered by the remembrance of the smothering drug odor. It was in my nostrils now, killing the sweet breath of the flowers; it had drifted in with Robert, clinging to his clothes. It sickened me. I wanted to sweep the Hedge of it—of the boy—of the whole nauseating mystery of Munro's fate.

I rose, saying: "I'm sorry, but I've letters to write."

"By Jove! so have I, nearly forgot," declared the Major rising; "I must be off. It's too bad you've no picture though, Bain."

"I'm going in to see Jean for a minute, Doctor," Robert said.

"Just call up to the Memsahib," I advised. Then I traveled to the sidewalk with Malcolm saying: "Ba , you've got this whole load perched on your shoulders like an old man of the sea—you must give me a chance to help."

"I'll call on yc soon as there's need," he answered. "See yon hammer-headed cloud! That's sullen looking; there'll be a storm to-morrow. The Major's a fair type of Christian if he'd only let himself believe it."

Left alone I sat in retrospect over the discussion that had just taken place. My mind must have been fogged

with so much of it; the wide range, India and theology and Brahmanism and our own mystery.

All the philosophy of the world seemed so utterly inadequate to glinting one strong flash of light across the darkened path of the lone furrow.

Not one of us had the slightest clew to work from—then with an erratic jump my mind landed irritatingly in the study at the Manse. Did Robert really know something? If not, why should I, unsuspicious naturally, attach so much importance to that drug smell and Robert's prevarication?

The thing tortured me. I must settle absolutely the matter of the photograph. I had hesitated to speak of it before others, but now— The boy's step on the veranda put a seal on my determination.

"Jean is feeling pretty blue," he said, as I rose, blocking his exit; "but there's no cause for despair. Munro'll come back when he—" The boy stopped abruptly.

"When he what?" I asked incisively.

"When he realizes what it means deserting Jean. He's gone off in some temporary fit of despondency; he's a weak man."

Again I felt the boy was prevaricating; that his lips were not uttering what was in his heart.

"Why didn't you offer Bain that photograph you had?" I asked, looking straight into his dissipated eyes. I saw them twitch nervously, then narrow to defiance. I read in them absolutely that I should get nothing from them but perhaps another lie.

"Where is Neil's picture?" I asked; "we need it. Was it that you put in your pocket?"

"It was something of Munro's and I threw it in the fire."

"What was it?"

"None of your business."

"Why did you lie about it?"

"Again, none of your business, Doctor."

I was staggered. It was something of importance enough to cause him to quarrel with me. He was ready enough always to quarrel with others, but with me he had been different.

"I'll speak to your sister about it—I'll ask her," I said, in a foolish threat.

He divined the weakness of my statement—quick to know that I would not execute this threat, and answered sneeringly: "Jean has trouble enough; if you wish to cause her more it rests with you. There's too much talk already," he added, as he swung the gate open; "it's a wise head that preserves a still tongue."

I felt that he had beaten me. His indifference to the accusation of having lied showed me that some stronger force governed his actions than his own susceptibilities. This seemed to make darker still the mystery.

The hopelessness of everything gloomed my spirits on into the evening. When the Memsahib went to church the house became utterly desolate. I sat in my study plodding on behind the solitary figure in the lonely furrow, watching her in speechless sorrow searching for something that she never found. Perhaps, like the princess in that weird love song of Afghanistan, who, with her lantern, searched the battlefield, she would come upon her lover slain. Perhaps even that would be better than this shadow-seeking.

Rousing myself, I wandered across the hall and into the drawing-room. It was dim with the blurring shadows of approaching night, the last gray of the dying light battled back by drawn curtains. The crimson-and-gold window across the way would brighten this gloom. A majesty of music welled up, cloudlike from the organ, pealing the end of the service, as I groped my way to a window. Thrusting back its curtain my hand fell upon the head of Jean, bent low to the ledge.

Jean must have heard my step, for she was less startled than I; and when she did not raise her head the thought came to me that she was weeping; I could feel a tremor.

"I'm sorry—I didn't know you were here," I said lamely. "It's too gloomy—come into the study and I'll read."

A sob answered me.

"Come," I continued, gently putting my hand on her arm.

The soft gray fabric that she always wore now grated on my fingers like crape. It was a seal of despair.

She rose to my little drag at her arm, saying: "I came to this quiet place to hide my cowardice; I should be braver."

"Not out of yourself, Jean; you couldn't be braver; but you must trust in God. You know that He will watch over your husband, that He will sustain you."

I think it was the utter impossibility of putting my thoughts upon material support—some reasonable argument to combat her despair—that caused me to so readily offer spiritual solace, for, inexperienced in this, I was lamely conventional. Like many a weakling in this field, I only blundered, for I accomplished something worse than if I had

remained silently sympathetic—I drove Jean into the most inexplicable revolt. I listened to a perfect torrent of rebellious despair; I had unwittingly thrown open the gates of the dike, and the pent waters of tried patience flooded forth. It was only afterwards that I remembered Jean's earlier struggle with this same spirit of rebellion.

"Carry to God what?" she asked, her voice cynically questioning, "a parched, dried desert of a heart, scorched by nothing but trial, but starvation of everything that fattens the heart of a human, and then have God turn His face away, and be thrust back into deeper misery? I've tried to be a Christian; I've read and plodded and listened and smothered down doubts and shut my eyes to the hypocrisy that sat, long-visaged, under denunciation from the pulpit, turning away with the cheek of a Pharisee the shafts that an inspired man leveled at their sins and their weaknesses."

Jean was trembling in her intensity; and, not answering, I pulled a chair, though we were still in the half light of the shadowed room.

"If ever a human being tried to come close to God I did," she resumed, "and to-night He is farther from me than from some murderer waiting in his cell to be hanged. What did God do for my father? Left to smother in his own weakness—and never in his heart was an evil thought for man or woman. And my brother—thrice accursed. Will God save him? Did not God remove the one man who had dominion over Robert's consuming passion for drink?"

"Jean," I pleaded; but she continued as though I had not spoken:

"If God ever had a zealous advocate on earth, it was

my husband. He had no thought but His labor; he gave his life for it, his soul."

"His soul?" I cried out of my dark mystification; "Neil's work would save the soul of a devil."

"You don't know; I say he gave more than his body to God's work. And now if we were to believe the accepted interpretation of salvation he would be better sitting there in a pew atoning for mean sins by a formality of church observances."

"You are wrong, Jean," I said bluntly; "God knows, and He rewards His faithful servants."

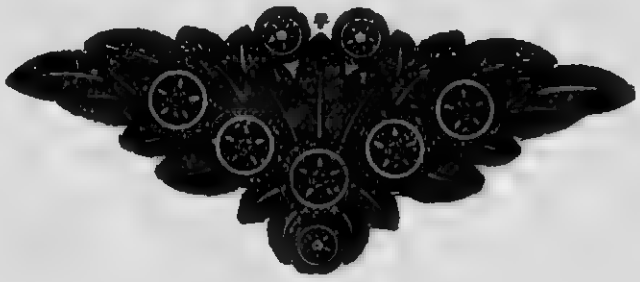
My words uttered in objection really had no bearing on the change that came over Jean. She had exhausted herself with her vehemence; the torturing spirit of revolt had escaped in words. A flood of tears welled up from the depths of her misery, and she sobbed: "My God! I'm tried too sorely. My heart grows lean with the starvation of hope. Black, black!—past, present, and future; all a pall, a cloud without light. I'm meager in my asking; not even love, nothing but just a ceasing from this long, never-ending trial. Let God give me back my husband—let God save him, then I'll believe everything."

"Jean, even if Neil be lost to us he'll be *saved*," I consoled. "Didn't the Lord deliver over to the tempter even Job's body for affliction after all the other trials had failed to shake the faith of the man of Uz—and didn't Job still bless the name of the Lord? That's what Neil himself would have done—is, no doubt, doing."

"You don't know, Doctor—nobody knows! I sometimes wonder if even the Almighty knows right from wrong."

I heard the the door swing; its creak was like a hush. I

was glad of the relief. Jean's despair and revolt were too powerful for my weak man's mastery; but the Memsahib would conquer it with just the uncombative way of a woman. She could talk to Jean of the unborn babe until she became like the Madonna, seeing nothing of the illimitable misery of the world, nothing but the savior that had been given her of the Creator.



CHAPTER IX

ONCE in the hush of midnight Memsahib and I sought to untangle this delicate-threaded skein of correlative affliction that draggled so persistently at the heels of Jean's trials. Memsahib held the invisible skein in her delicate hands, while I blunderingly sought for the true thread of continuity.

With a tug at an evident thread I exclaimed: "Jean gives expression to such extraordinary pronounced bitterness against the Church influence that has practically submerged her living life in a living death of despond. With her constancy and courage, Christianity should have sustained her even in a trial of this magnitude."

"You forget something, husband," Memsahib answered —going on to show me that I had seized upon the wrong thread—"at present, Jean is not Jean at all—she is an overtried woman with tortured nerves. A woman in her condition is subject to strange fancies and hallucinations; everything rational becomes irrational. Why, I've known a woman, conjuring up disaster for her unborn babe, to turn against her own mother; so when Jean says she doubts God's goodness, she just voices one of these suspicious an-

tipathies that she might have held, without the slightest cause, against you, or me, or Bain, or——"

The Memsahib hesitated. I knew she was casting about in her mind for even a stronger, closer tie of consanguinity that Jean should have held to, and it came to me suddenly, as a revelation, that Memsahib had exhausted the list. In the whole world we three, unrelated to Jean, were, by a caprice of Fate, the bounden Door of Hope to the Valley of Achor in which she wandered.

The Memsahib resumed, returning empty-handed from her mental search: "Jean's child will lead her back to a Christian acceptance of God's dispensing, then she will become her old self again. I don't mean that if Neil is still absent, his fate wrapped up in mystery or solved in a bitter way, that she will be the joyous woman she was before, but she will bear her cross bravely; and for such as do that, there is a sweet reward of hope."

Then at once I discovered a tangle in the skein. "If the blow falls before her baby is born," I said—"if something terrible transpires over Neil's fate?"

The Memsahib figurately rolled the whole skein into a hard ball by answering: "We shall know this first and, if necessary, we must tell Jean a deliberate lie—I shall; and I'm sure I shall be forgiven for the sin, if it be one. We'll lock the gate against every tongue, and tell her that there is no news of Neil—until after."

"Yes, we've put our hands to the plow, girl, and we must not turn back. I'm with you—we'll carry Jean."

Memsahib gave me one of her quaint little smiles of appreciation and took my face in her hands, saying: "And all for *my* friend—you are very good!"

"My friend, too," I answered.

Then to prove my willing interest, I dipped into plans for the future, saying cheerfully:

"I'll conjure up happenings to break the monotony; and what has become of our picnics to West Branch—by Jove! just when they were most needed, too. We've forgotten all about them, haven't we?"

"So we have—it is strange the children haven't been clamoring for them. We'll have one to-morrow and twice a week after this until——"

The Memsahib hesitated. That dreadful until! it would end many a sentence of hope and despair for us, until—ah! there it was again.

"Yes, to-morrow," I concurred eagerly; "it will do Jean good in every way. Will you round up some of the other children, Isabel and Margie; and I'll ask Bain? He'll be handy to have along; he'll keep an eye on the weather for us."

"No, not Malcolm!" Memsahib objected, and her lips were hardened to thinness in decision.

"Why not? He'd enjoy it—he's just as simple as a great boy."

"Because—because—oh, I hate to even think of it—I believe women are the most spiteful creatures on the face of the earth."

"Yes," I interjected encouragingly.

"Well, Miss Harkett has heard things."

"Which was it—the Ladies' Aid, or the Sewing Circle, or——?"

"It isn't in the Church. You know, she has music pupils in many homes, and I suppose they've let their

tongues wag, unconscious of the terrible crime they were committing."

"Yes, yes, please connect it with the picnic, else I don't want to hear about it. For unless a woman sits beside a man while she is talking, what she says is of little interest."

"They were malignant—they were unthinking! They said that Malcolm was in love with Jean, and that Minister must have come to know of this——"

"I think he must have known that before—others did; and that Jean chose the man she loved."

"Don't you understand, husband—they are saying that Jean really loved Malcolm all the time."

"Which is nonsense."

"It is; but their vile scandal isn't nonsense. Think what would happen if it were whispered loud enough for Jean to hear! Don't you see?—she is so entirely innocent that the scandal people might find evident confirmation of their lies; and Malcolm—well, he's just stupid in his absence of consciousness."

My thoughts went back to the trouble in the grocery store.

"I see; we mustn't have Malcolm at the picnic then?" I questioned.

"No; we mustn't. And we must see less of him here."

"Heavens! and give the best fellow in the world the cold shoulder because some old cats malign him?"

"No; for Jean's sake—and not the cold shoulder."

"How can we manage it?" I asked.

"I don't know. We must just see as we go along. But this is one case, the picnic, in which we need not help the scandal."

"Of course this is a very easy proposition, but I see a vista studded with pitfalls before us in a general endeavor to head off a man unconscious of the fact that he is not wanted. And I'd rather put everyone of those gossipers on a *suttee* pile and cremate them, than load Malcolm's clean mind up with this filth."

On the morrow the Hedge premises fairly vibrated with a bustling preparation for our picnic. Of course it was school vacation, and the children were primed with the giant powder of readiness for fun.

Such a merry turmoil in the kitchen over the lunch basket. The sandwiches, the cakes, the bottle of milk, the jar of lemonade, and—it was my suggestion, born of many summers on the Western prairie—a camp kettle for tea.

Blitz understood. He sniffed at the bathing suits approvingly. Upstairs, downstairs, and in the Memsahib's chamber he scurried after the little ones.

At last Cook Sarah's voice is heard: "Come on, children!" and we marshal on the lawn, bulging with utensils until we resemble the Acadians about to be exiled.

Away we go; Blitz, fearful that he may be forced to share the fate of Laddie's pup locked up in the cellar, scampers over the stone wall and pushes on ahead. He knows quite well what we are up to.

We gather in our quondam relatives, Margie and Elizabeth, and, like a comet—an orderly comet of leisurely procedure—stream over the hills and far away to West Branch, that is calling, calling, over its pebbled reaches, like the sea whispering to sons of mariners.

The small feet patter eagerly over the rustic bridge that, like a lover's knot, binds the cleaved ends of the pink road-

way. Beneath, the brook chuckles and laughs in its freedom, as though it were a boy playing truant from school; for, has it not, higher up in the forest-holding valley, leaped a wooden dam the human toilers, beaverlike, have thrown across its path? To the right MacKay's sign "Trespassers will be Prosecuted," leans hopelessly to one side, and some one, in misguided humor, has hung a dead crow from the post. To the left, following the lead of portly Sarah, we clamber over a much-disarranged panel of the rail fence, and are knee-deep in a daisy-spattered meadow; purpled-plumed asters are trampled ruthlessly under foot; we are like a destroying army.

As if to escape our onslaught, a wild clematis has rushed up a lightning-shattered tree stub to save its feathery clusters of white star flowers. Across the stream the intense green leaves of a Virginia creeper drape the mournful ugliness of a dead pine.

We are traveling into a horseshoe, a crescent of young cedars, festooned with myriad green buds till their boughs droop. Here and there in this olive-green line show touches of gold and silver where the brook smiles at the sunlight, or tosses its chipped ripple over whispering stones.

The brook's purling drone hushes us of the care-thought to silence; its song is a lullaby that attunes our ears to something that echoes far down the cavern of the past, something that tinkled in the laughing days of childhood.

But the children race with eager cries through the meadow, and the tall grass grasps and clutches at their pink legs and winds about their little toes, and there is always some one of the seven going down or getting up, at one end or other of a fall.

I hear a deep drawn-in breath just at my elbow; some one is draining a cup of this nature nectar, the wondrous draught that is sunshine and balsamed air. Then a voice says, "Isn't this glorious?"

I turn quickly in astonishment. It is Jean.

"Here we are," says the Memsahib. "Hueh-h! Thank goodness that basket will be lighter to carry home. I'll bet we've forgotten something—we always do; sugar, lemons? yes, there they are." Strange to say, everything needed seems to have been remembered.

In the cool shade of a cedar we rest after our battle with the sun. Just ahead of us are the two swimming pools, "Shiner" and "Two-logs." These bathing *ghats* are like the village school; the little ones as they learn to swim graduate from the shallow "Shiner," with its floor of gleaming pearls, to the great lake that is "Two-logs." I can cast a fly with my six-ounce trout rod across this vast expanse of water, but to the little ones it is a Hellespont.

All at once the air is shattered by the battle cry of Indians. A figure, all but naked, darts from behind the hiding skirts of a cedar, and yelling murderously, "Watch me dive, you people—Hi-yi-yi-yi!" dashes through the sunlight, then disappears over a cliff, and a great shower of pearls, sparkling white, are thrown above the emerald grass border.

There go the whole band of them—little Sioux in pink and blue bathing suits. Involuntarily my fingers are at my shoe laces, a matter of thirty years wiped off the slate by the necromancy of forgetfulness. But I have brought my brushes, to take my share of the sport in sedate seriousness. The bridge with its simple lines suggests tangible results

with little perplexity of drawing. The strong sunlight sets forth the chiaroscuro in easy blocks. I go at it with full brush, with an indolent nonchalance that promises looseness and breadth.

Blitz is making great hunting with his nose, reading the letter page of the night's writing. Just there where the eddies swirl, jewel-beaded, about the denuded roots of a pine stump, purple-gray from twenty years of weathering, ends the wondrous trail scent of some vulgarly perfumed traveler whom Blitz would like to reprimand for trespass. But the terrier's cogitations are cut short by Laddie, who, seizing him, plunges into the pool. When Blitz reappears upon the bank his aspect is so pathetic that Jean laughs.

Ah! we are pleased with him evidently; and in a second he is at our feet, sending over us a shower of water.

A red squirrel sits upon the fence and cocks his whiskered nose inquiringly at the noisy animals that have come into his domain. "Chirrh-rh-rh! chuch, chuch!" Fatal note of expostulation; unwise denunciation; for Blitz, leaving the intangible record of an animal that has come and gone, a muskrat, speeds with whine of delight to little Reddy, whose plumelike tail, flipping so jauntily while he jeered at us slow-footed humans, is now straight out in the exigencies of flight. Fleet as he is, his route is a tortuous one; the rail fence is a series of recumbent triangles; his course is southeast by southwest, nautically diagramed.

Now Blitz has headed him, a panel of the fence short of a tall elm, which was Reddy's objective. Back they come. The dog's eager yelp stirs the boy in me again; pallet discarded, I become an accomplice—not possessed of blood lust, but chasing up and down without thought of disaster to

harmless Reddy. It is Doo-doo's passionate cry of reproach that awakens me to the enormity of our onslaught. "I ought to be ashamed!" Indeed, I am, now that Doo-doo puts it that way. And Blitz, who has clambered to the topmost rail, is lifted down and most securely held close to the cake basket, that he may forget. He is even tempted with a piece of cruller, which is his epitome of gastronomic indulgence.

I go back to my chromatic scrawl; my eye unblinded now, freed from the surcharge of color by the interruption, takes critical cognizance of this, my latest mournful failure.

The sketching never comes to much at a West Branch picnic. The trees, mighty elms, obdurately elbow too much of the landscape out of the canvas; I get no distance—everything is in the front yard, and behind the front yard is nothing. There are no converging lines in field beyond field—at least I find none. And at close range the bunchy cedars symbolize the fiercely green trees that are in toy Noah's arks.

The children have dressed by now, and like hornets swarm about the lunch that Sarah has spread upon a rug.

"We are all ready for the tea," Memsahib calls; "light the fire."

By Jove! I had forgotten it. Some dry twigs are quickly gathered; I put a finger and thumb in my vest pocket and find a pencil and two postage stamps—they are the stamps I had looked for so earnestly in the morning. But now my search is for a match. Generally they are in at least three pockets, but now——

"Haven't you got a match?" Memsahib asks.

"I'm afraid—" I fumble. "Ah, by Jove! here's one. We've got to be careful; I've got *just one*."

There are some dry leaves and a whittled twig. As I kneel, the Memsahib holds my coat against the slight breeze, and Jean, and even Sarah, stand in tense attitude, watching the momentous trial. I hold my breath and strike the match. It flares up deceitfully; one leaf is seared, and that is all. We've missed fire.

"I've never seen it fail," the Memsahib remarks—"never! And we *have* forgotten something—the matches; I said we had—I knew it!"

I sit in dejection. Casually I notice that there is a little glow of color in Jean's pale cheeks. The wondrous triviality of a match has drawn her interest into forgetfulness; my panacea of hurly-burly is working splendidly. I had been all for a cup of tea, a souchong dipsomaniac; but now lemonade—any old thing will do, I cry.

"My dear boy," objects the Memsahib, "you must think of us poor women. We've simply got to have tea. Jean needs a cup."

"I've got a headache," declares Sarah.

"How they do hammer a man when he's made a mistake," I mutter.

"I can get a match," offers Laddie; "there's men working in the field up on the hill—they'll have matches, 'cause they smoke."

So away the boy goes, and is soon back; and presently the camp kettle is giving us a pibroch like faintly heard bagpipes pianissimo. Then there is spirit rapping from the lid; the imprisoned musician suggesting the possibility of moving great iron engines.

We squat like Burmese Phoongyis about a pagoda that is a pyramid of sandwiches. We worship it till it vanishes;

when, lo! the mango-tree trick is outdone—Sarah executes a mystic pass, and a cake appears magically in its place. At a cabalistic word from the Memsahib, Sarah—she is greater than Hermann—conjures up a lemon pie. We sit around the shores of this little lake of chrome and the audience yell with delight; table manners are at a discount; it is really a pantomime play after all.

The illusion is purely hypnotic, I know; otherwise, why does not my appetite slacken? I imagine I have eaten things, for I am still hungry—we all are.

I am eating an unsubstantial, frail something, and Kippie, holding up a similar strip of sweetness says, "I dess love woman's fumbs."

Luckily no one is cruel enough to correct her with "lady-fingers," and I, speaking, throw the blame of our laughter on Blitz.

Bananas walk across the rug and languidly recline before each squatter; oranges roll into the circle, and of themselves select their individual owners.

There are at least seven little white dogs. I have just given Blitz the last of a sandwich, and yonder, across the little valley that is between Doo-doo and me, a white dog is having a piece of cake. Immediately, just at my left, Kippie has given another one a piece of pie crust. Indeed, it is magic, because Jean is laughing.

"What's the joke?" I ask; I have heard nothing humorous.

"You are stirring your tea with a cruller, Father." Doo-doo bears false witness I declare. And I had not even seen the tea poured. I must have been asleep and dreaming, for the beverage wakens me. There is nothing

unusual, absolutely nothing; there is only one little overfed white terrier rolling contentedly in the grass, stuffed to the point of discomfort.

"You'll have indigestion, Father," Doo-doo says, perhaps reading my thoughts. "Come and play squat tag. And you, too, Mother."

The kindly cedars close in, holding their skirts wide to hide us from chance passers on the road as we play squat tag. Jean is drawn so far into it that she acts as umpire; just sipping at my medicine, I call it. But when my knees commence to ache from much squatting, I know that my digestion is all right, and say so; and, lighting a cigar, stretch myself in the nestling grass, and watch the green fade from the little valley with its holding of hay meadows, and the pines that shutter its upper reach grow purple beneath the wine-red sky.

In the east a harvest moon, copper-hued, draws itself lazily from the grasp of a holding hill. In fancy I see, winding down the blurred road-trail, brawny scythe men, their bare arms showing nut brown, and beside them trip maids that carry stone flagons and sheaves of grain. One maid's voice carries to my ears saying: "Come on, Father, wake up; we're going home now."

"Gracious! was I asleep?" I query, in too frank unwisdom, and they all laugh.

The long hill and all that has gone before tires Kippie's little legs, and taking her astride my shoulder we finish the pilgrimage marching gallantly up the center of the village street.

As we swing through the Hedge, Jean sighs. I know. For hours she has forgotten—almost; and now the shadow

of despair chides her for her lapse of memory. Just a little aftermath of depression, the dust crumbling back into the footprints of exhilarated gambols. I am wondering if my nature panacea will allay the mind's spiritual illness—will the sun and the youth elixir check the heart's revolt? This summer the village, with its varicolored life, had thrust itself suddenly into my vision like an apple blossom bursting forth in one day upon a leafless limb. Hitherto the villagers had been people who had followed daily vocations and believed in the church; but now the air was charged with electric currents of esoteric projectings.

Here was Jean, stricken by sorrow, neither chastened to a greater Christianity nor submissive because of the scourge. But I had been convinced that this was nothing more than a phase of her mental illness, just as when one is ill physically he turns against all physical things, food—everything.

But in spite of the Memsahib's bravely spoken optimism, she troubled much over Jean's spiritual vagaries.

The Memsahib was as stanch in her convictions as John Knox; the stake if need be, but no wavering. She had always looked askance at the Agnostic's philosophy—she had another name for it really, and now, in the way of tribulation there was evidence of a friendship between Jean and the Agnostic.

I was sure this would prove helpful, but the Memsahib was cross about it. When I maintained that the Major was altogether lovable in his nature she ignored his personality, and pitched upon the biting evil of his words; his cynical, ever-recurrent attack upon church people, saying impetuously: "It will just give unkind tongues food for gossip.

They'll say Jean is a backslider, that she's a friend of an enemy of the church. They won't understand her not attending worship, as we do; some of them could never understand the torture she would undergo facing the pulpit that to her would be empty. Besides, we can't advise the village that Jean is expecting a baby."

"But it is going to be so difficult to hedge Jean about with a moral barrier that these strong throwers can't top with some missile," I answered despondently. "It will come to this, if we keep on, that I'll have to put on the door a red card marked 'scarlet fever.' We'll be practically, socially, quarantined. Lord bless me! Allis," I broke in impatiently, "Jean is a free agent. If she wishes to talk to a good clean man I can't first catechize him on the articles of faith."

Strangely enough I was arguing against myself, for I was really at one with the Memsahib on this question.

"Well, I know one thing," the Memsahib added decisively, "that, wise as the Agnostic thinks he is, and clever as his Pagan books and papers may be, a little baby will make fools of them all. Jean can't feel chubby fingers kneading her cheek, or the little warm arms about her neck, and believe in this heathenish thing. She'll be thanking God then for His mercy in sending her something to love. That will be her salvation from everything."

"Or if Neil should be found—alive," I said.

"Yes, but I can't believe that he will. How could any sane man go away from home and leave a woman like Jean—I mean, stay away? He might have gone, but if he were alive she should have heard from him."

"But Munro wasn't sane, I'm sure," I interposed; "Jean

doesn't think him dead, and you believe as well as I do that there is something that she won't speak about."

"It's all guesswork—dark mystery; I strive not to think of it; I close my mind to everything but a hope that he may return alive; I live in suspense, just trusting in the Lord's protecting care for the time till Jean's baby comes."

"And won't that apply to the Agnostic's presence? It may help to keep Jean from brooding."

"It's a dangerous remedy." She caught me by the arm excitedly, and pointing through the window said: "The Major is coming now, and Jean is on the lawn. Just keep him from talking about Christians and the folly of religion."

Hurrying out, I saw the Major sauntering leisurely up the walk. The Major had a mind prolific of expedient, and generally bore some unnecessary excuse for what he feared might be an intrusion. This time he had it in his hand—a pear, rich red in cheek.

"What kind of pear do you call this, Doctor?" he asked, carrying himself, fruit, and question through the gate.

I took the tempting thing gravely enough, and knowing it was all pretense on his part, deliberately ate the mystery.

"I call it a good pear," I answered, "and that's about as strong as I am on horticulture."

The Major laughed, saying: "That grew on a tree in my yard and I have never known the name of it; besides, I have never had so sensible an answer before. I think if we'd trouble less over the abstract attributes of things, such as that pear's proper name, and enjoy the goodness of them, we'd be happier."

I headed him off by chasing Blitz away from a cat he had treed up the maple.

But Fate had been busy in the meantime, for, when I came back to the lawn, Jean from the hammock was carrying the Agnostic along—she was saying: "If we would only speak from our absolute knowledge there would be fewer lies told."

"Yes, we might well think more and talk less," I said, sitting down.

"But you Christians condemn unbounded exercise of thought," the Agnostic added; "blind acceptance of formulated tenets, that's the superstructure raised upon a mythological base."

I was accustomed to this sort of thing, but I turned apprehensively toward Jean. In surprise I noticed that she was not even startled.

"Indeed," she said, harking a little back to my speech, "after all, words are better than thoughts. It is the silent argument that makes cowards of us all; dragons can be explained away. If we could come face to face with every accusation, let light in on every dark spot—well, it would be at least brighter. It is the cutting that lends beauty to the diamond; the noblest sentiment hidden in itself is of little avail; love unuttered is almost like a poison, it——"

Jean stopped suddenly, and taking up the trail of her startled eyes I discovered Bain's head just topping the hedge. He had come straight across the noiseless earth road; his solemn face, full to us, looked grotesquely droll, its seeming support the slender lilacs.

I swung my hand toward the gate, and as Bain joined our group he had his usual alpha of conversation.

"That was a fine shower last night," he said, as he took the camp stool I held toward him. "Yes, a fine

shower," he continued; "it'll bring on the fall pasture. I'm thinking we'll have a wet month. The moon has been drinking heavily the first half, and we'll get it back—we'll get it back. Aye, that's nature's way—'for value received I promise to pay.'"

"Your big body, Malcolm, is fattening to the excellence of some future ruler of men according to that," I commented.

"It'll be little use without the mainspring, I'm th' ing," Malcolm replied, "and I'll be needing that myself, wherever I am."

"We were just discussing something of that, Cameron and I," the Agnostic added.

I repudiated this, declaring that such matters were beyond me.

"They shouldn't be that," objected Bain. "Christianity is a very simple matter. It's like all things pertaining to creation, wonderful because of its extreme simplicity."

"The Major says it is mythology," I objected; and immediately I realized I had given him an opening.

"It's too simple for yon complicated business, mythology," Bain affirmed. "It's just following what a man knows to be his true guidance. There's little sin because of actual ignorance, in spite of all we hear on yon point."

"There you are," cried the Agnostic exultantly; "all the teaching's for nothing. And yet Christians claim that Agnosticism is a dangerous thing, that free thought is the Devil's invention."

"Agnosticism is hardly a dangerous thing," declared Bain, to my astonishment and to the Agnostic's pleasure, for his face lighted up. "It's just a hopeless sophistry," Mal-

colm added, after an aggravating pause; "it's not strong enough to be dangerous, it's just hopeless—just hopeless."

"How is that, man?" queried the Agnostic.

"Well, I'm thinking it wouldn't harm a strong, upright man much, that is, from the viewpoint of his fellows. You're an example yourself. I'd be very willing to vote for you if you were running for Parliament, for, as Antony said, 'You're an honorable man.'"

"Thank you, Malcolm."

"In that way there's little to choose between your way of thinking and my own, or any other Christian's; but Christianity, the Church, will pull a man out of the gutter. Poor weaklings—and the world is full of them—find the flabby muscles of their minds toughened and made strong by it; aye, even strong men that have gone weak, because of pressure, are brought back to moral health by the simple lesson that God loved such that are of that portion of the world so much that He sent His own son as bearer of this message of redemption, or help, or hope, whichever you choose to call it. And that shows the use of Christianity, and the uselessness of Agnosticism, and the hopelessness of it, because I never yet knew a man that it found in the mire and sat him in the clean sweet-smelling meadow of life."

I stared at the heavy-headed man that was talking in the low, measured, earnest voice of one who relates a true happening of interest.

"Very fine, Malcolm," the Agnostic declared, "but it doesn't work out. What do we see here in the village in the way of religion? There's Mrs. MacCormick—I'll give you a sample of Church tuition. She's the strictest body

in the whole Kirk—*in* the Kirk, mind you, I say. Last year she came to me two weeks before Thanksgiving and obtained an order for a turkey. Turkeys were twelve cents a pound in the stores, but hers were to be 'birds,' something extra, mind you, corn fed and all the rest of it, and fourteen cents a pound, my dear boy. Well, I agreed to take one. She said that everybody was to pay her that price for her turkeys, being so fine, mind you."

"By Jove! I got one of that lot," I said; "go on; what happened—I believe I know."

"If you got one from Mrs. MacCormick you do know. I was away the day the Christian body brought the bird, and the good wife took it in and paid fourteen cents a pound; and as true as I'm sitting here, that poor dead turkey had peas enough in his crop to have kept him over winter. His neck looked as if he had died of goitre. I weighed his crop—nigh on to two pounds. Peas are worth a cent a pound, and worthy Mrs. MacCormick got fourteen for hers."

"My turkey was the same," I concurred.

"Now, was that Christian dealing?" asked the Agnostic.

"No, it was not," declared Bain; "and if it wasn't for that same sort of thing, for the evil weakness—cupidity and the rest of it that is in humanity, Christian teaching wouldn't be needed at all."

"But she's had a fair chance at Christian teaching."

"Aye; I don't know how she'll turn out. It takes a long time with some of them; and a few I'm feared never come round—just hang off too late, and the Devil catches them unawares. I believe they get a double dose of punishment, too, for all their pretense."

"Is Mrs. MacMillan a Christian?" asked the Agnostic pointedly.

"Man alive! I can hardly answer for myself—I'm always in doubt."

"She's always at prayer meeting; and just now she's crying her eyes out because there's no regular minister."

"She's a bit troublesome at times, I must admit," said Malcolm calmly; "she's a pushing body. I think she likes to see the church in a prosperous condition."

"She doesn't forget Mrs. MacMillan in the meantime. Last week she brought a basket of butter, pound prints. I'm a bit suspicious when they come around skipping the stores—there's generally something doing. 'Twenty-one cents a pound,' quoted she.

"'I'm buying from the stores at twenty,' I said.

"'Where do they get their profit, for they offered me twenty?' she queried.

"'In trade,' I replied; 'their profit is on their goods.'

"'All right. Twenty cents cash'll do,' said she.

"I tasted the butter—it was fine; and carried it to the kitchen to give her back her basket. On the way I kept thinking: 'This can't be all clear sailing—what's up anyway that she's come to me?'"

"You're a suspicious man—you're lacking in faith," commented Bain dryly.

"Aye; dealing with Christians."

"I turned a pound pattie of the butter over, hefting it in my hand, judging if the weight was short or not. It was a lovely yellow and solid as Jersey butter should be. Suddenly I discovered a change of color on the bottom of the pattie; and there, like a silver medal—no, like a lead medal,

was a big wad of pale—well, Lord bless you, man, it may have been lard; but it was dovetailed into the real thing so that only an expert could have found it. And it was rank—by Jove! but it was rank!"

"What did you do?" Malcolm asked, and I saw Jean holding her lips tight against a laugh.

"Do? I took it back to Mrs. MacMillan—she was sitting in the hall with a face as meek as that picture of Nicodemus on the Sunday-school cards. I handed the basket to her saying, 'The housekeeper has just bought a quantity of butter, and she's against my taking this while the weather's hot!'"

"Man, were you afraid to tell her the truth," queried Bain, "that you must put the blame of refusal on the good housekeeper?"

"Is there a man in this village that wouldn't shrink from Mrs. MacMillan's sharp tongue? Besides, catching a body thieving makes one feel as bad as if he were an accomplice, I think."

"What did she say?" asked Malcolm, and [illegible] the wrinkle in his cheek I knew he was smothering a smile.

"Well, the angel went out of her face in a minute as she said:

"'Bargains is like pie crust, made to be broke, I suppose.'

"'Pie crust has lard in it—too,' I remarked at that.

"'I don't understand,' said she.

"'The bottoms of the patties are bleached, you've churned in the sun,' I explained."

"Did she take the hint?" Malcolm asked.

"She took the hint, basket, butter, and all, and flounced

out of the house, very angry with me because she had failed in cheating me, and now she's telling everybody I'm an atheist and worship graven images."

"Aye," said Malcolm dryly, "and she'll not fool the Lord with the spurious article in her religion either. It's only the honest dealers that'll make trade with Him."

"Well, what do you make of that?" queried the Agnostic.

"Just nothing as regards religion; but it's sad to see individuals too near in a bargain. I've seen a cow on a farm that was what they call a robber cow; she'd eat as much as any of them, and look slick and contented, but she'd be a bad milker, and inferior quality at that. But the farmer would not give up butter making and condemn the whole business. Generally he'd turn the robber into beef. We can't do that with the delinquents in the Church, of course, but we can utilize them in some other way. Now, the lady you speak of will do more to make a church social a success than any other woman in the congregation; and, though you mightn't believe it, she's a free giver to missions and all calls on the purse."

"Missions!" snorted the Agnostic. "They'll give to missions, to the heathen in Africa or India. Aye, and didn't they let that poor body, Jennie Stubbs, starve to death, because her brother drank all his money and wouldn't support her?"

"I didn't know of that in time," answered Malcolm; "I'm afraid there's some truth in it."

"What's your opinion of missions?" asked the Agnostic, turning to me; "you've been in India, Cameron."

"I haven't much faith in them," I answered candidly

enough. "I know in Calcutta none of the Sahibs would hire a Christian servant if they could get a Mussulman, or even a Hindoo. I had one, a Telugu, from the Madras coast, and I thought he was an exception to this rule, but in the end he looted me thoroughly."

"It wasn't Christianity that made him bad though," objected Bain, "he was simply a bad Christian."

"Yes, he was a bad Christian, right enough; and the warmed-up article, I'm afraid, is apt to produce spiritual indigestion. It's like feeding a rice-eater upon canned beef, this insistent swap of religions."

"Religions?" quoted Malcolm—"they're pagans."

"And yet one of the holiest men I ever knew was a Buddhist," I contended—this talk having carried me back to a sweet memory—"one Pathenine."

"There you are," said the Agnostic, "Christianity or a belief in religion, you see, is not necessary to produce the finest quality of human."

"In his case it was," I objected; "it was his faith in the Buddhist religion, which is not so very dissimilar from our own. He was held to his high moral plane by the Buddhistic Christ—Gautama."

"But would that simple faith be sufficient for the higher mental development that people living in America or Europe possess?" queried Bain. "It may have held good in your Burman's case; no doubt he was a man of the jungle."

"Indeed, he was not; he was cashier in the Bank of Bengal in Akyab, an educated man, and a fine Shakespearian scholar, too, at that."

"Hadn't we one such in our own village?" declared the Agnostic, "John Lancey. I mention his case to disprove

your argument, Cameron, that a man must believe in the Unseen to be superlatively good in the evident. For twenty years John was never inside a church, and when he died every man, woman, and child was at his funeral, and it was felt that the sweetest, most honorable man in the whole village had gone!"

"He was a rare man," affirmed Malcolm. "If ever there was a human that didn't need spiritual sustaining it was Lancey. But that state was not because he didn't accept religion: it was because he didn't know how to be bad, he was bred absolutely right. His mother and his father were Church people, and he never went wrong. But there's Crowley, and there's Blake, and Smiley, and MacPhedran—they were vomiting their souls into the Devil's caldron, that's what they were doing. God! man, I've seen them till my heart ached. They were good workmen—Crowley was as fine a carpenter as ever drove a plane, but the drink turned him into a poor, useless tool, and a demon to his family. And what saved them—they're men now? Was it teaching them there was no God to look after them? No, a servant of God"—Bain lowered his voice till it fell short of Jean's ears and whispered, "Neil Munro—with the power of God over him, pulled those weaklings back from the mouth of the pit, and if you asked them to go back to the old life because some one in the church had cheated, they'd look on you as insane."

"You mustn't count me on your side," I said laughingly to the Agnostic; "though I have little faith in the missions, yet, like Bain here, I think we'd be very badly off without something to make fast to. Life is an erratic flood, and we're cockle-shell craft at best."

"God is indeed deified by some," the Agnostic asserted;

" good results are attributed to His influence, and bad happenings to the Evil One's machinations. The men you speak of, Bain, were strengthened by the influence of an enthusiastic human. He opened their eyes by a living picture of their own loss, physically——"

I felt a hand on my shoulder. Bain and the Agnostic rose together. " Good day, Mrs. Cameron."

The Memsahib, leaning over the bench back, said, to my astonishment, in an even tone: " Don't let me interrupt you, Major."

Inwardly I smiled, for I could see that he did not relish the idea of continuing in the presence of the Memsahib.

" I was just saying," he continued, " that organic results are credited often to visionary causes; an argument without correlative proof must be weak: it's like believing in clairvoyants and spiritualists. There is no such thing as influence upon the mind other than that which can be conveyed materially, physically—by sight, or sound, or touch; pain teaches us fear, and having seen pain removed or alleviated, we get hope; and we come to have faith in others by having seen their words come true. Theosophists, with their Mahatmas and their esoteric projections, are not greater humbugs than some Christians who juggle with God's spirit, using it as a scourge, or a reward, its very inefficacy of nonexistence rendering it the more terrible to those who dread the unseen, the unknown."

" You mean, Major, that there's no interchange of spirit influence except by words, or sight, or touch—in fact, that it would need a transmission of a message from one mind to another, outside of one of these three manifestations, to prove you are wrong, for instance? " the Memsahib asked quietly.

"Yes, Mrs. Cameron; I think that's my point of view."

"Well, Major, if you will kindly come with me to the nursery I think I can convince you that there is still something in the universe your logic cannot account for. And we must have the others as witnesses."

The Memsahib smiled very gently into my wondering eyes as we rose to follow her lead. I was glad to see Jean come as eagerly as the others.

Upstairs, our footsteps hushed by a strange expectancy, we crept noiselessly, and at the nursery door Memsahib put a finger to her lips warningly. We tiptoed gently into the room and the Memsahib pointed toward the cot upon which the twins, Elsie and Beatrice, were lying asleep. At once I understood her strategy, for we had often discussed in wonderment the phenomenal unity of spirit that governed the little girls' actions.

One twin was a replica of the other in posture. They were lying on their left sides, exactly alike; left hand under cheek, and the right folded sweetly across a plump little chest, even the restful droop of each head was the same.

It was not necessary for the Memsahib to speak. The Agnostic took in the full significant beauty of the scene, and I think it suffused his being with the same gentle wonderment that it did ours.

But Memsahib was only half done with her experiment. She rocked the foot of the cot gently back and forth on its castors; just enough to half rouse the little ones from their deep slumber. With a deeper breath, a little sigh, Elsie uncurled her arms, and turning over, rested with one chubby hand folded over the other. While one could count five we stood in breathless suspense, waiting—we all understood.

With what intensity I watched a sign of compliance from Bee. Ah! I could have shouted in triumph, for, as if called by a voice in slumberland, Bee turned, her fingers groped for each other, then they, too, were united.

Memsahib put the light cover softly over the little ones, and turning, I saw two great tears pearling Jean's eyes.

As softly as we had come up the stairs we went down again, I explaining to the Major that the Memsahib called me to the nursery almost nightly to see this beautiful, mysterious spirit-arranged tableau.

Outside the Major said: "Thank you, Mrs. Cameron; that's the most beautiful sight I have ever seen."

"Yes," the Memsahib answered, "from the first a Babe has confounded the philosophers, and 'Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.' The sublime wisdom of Jesus asserted itself when He said, 'Suffer little children to come unto me,' for there is no element in the world so powerful to alleviate sorrow or to keep the heart pure and good as the presence of little children."

I think the two men would have liked to have kissed this wise little woman; I *did,* and so did Jean.

The Memsahib's object lesson had the curious effect of causing the argument to pass into oblivion.

The Major, whether he felt defeat or not, had the delicacy to convey that impression, and at the same time sustain the sweet ending by remaining theologically silent; in fact, with protective discrimination he took up the matter of the Twins' affinity.

"Their resemblance is remarkable," he said, "even for twins; I can't tell them apart."

"Nobody can," claimed Memsahib very proudly; "I am

always being corrected myself by one or the other for misnaming them. I am always hearing, 'I'm not Elsie, Mother, I'm Bee'; or the other way about. In fact, to the family, the name 'Twinnie' has become absolutely necessary. It's 'here Twinnie,' or 'wait a minute Twinnie'—that saves investigation at close range."

As an interested partner I contributed some facts out of my own knowledge, saying: "They always weigh exactly the same. If one becomes ill the other seems to fall away in flesh too; we've never found them an ounce apart."

"But if one gets anything—measles, or cold, or croup, the other one is sure to get it," Memsahib interposed. "If Bee hurts herself, Elsie cries, and if Elsie is sent to her room in punishment, Bee goes and sits with her."

"What do they think about it themselves," the Major asked—"or do they think separately?"

"They must have different viewpoints," answered the Memsahib, "for they quarrel."

"About who's who?" questioned the Major, with a laugh.

"One of their quarrels was about—well, it was this way: They were in bed with the chickenpox, and Sarah heard them crying. When she went to the nursery she found they had fallen out over the momentous question as to which had the greater number of pockmarks on her face. To pacify them Sarah had to count, and Bee, defeated, made it honors easy by contending that she had more on her body. And yet they're curiously mixed themselves over each other's identity. I observed Elsie looking in the mirror one day, and casually asked her what she saw there? She promptly answered, 'I see Bee.'"

"You're to be congratulated Doctor, on having such a pair of little girls," the Major said, provoking a pleased smile from the Memsahib.

"I'm being eclipsed," I retorted. "When I first came to the village I was known as Allis Bransford's husband, now I am known as the 'Father of the Twins.'"

Bain laughingly declared he must go, saying there was a meeting of the elders that evening in the church.

He hung for a little over the gate, allowing the Major to move away.

"Our Agnostic got a black eye over his materialistic argument," he said, his big shoulders trembling from a suppressed chuckle.

"What's the meeting about, Bain?" I asked.

"A section are determined to extend a call to the Rev. Donald Grey, and I've got to fight against it. If they get their way they'll have fine punishment coming though, for he's a narrow-minded busybody if there ever was one in the ministry. But I must be going."

The Memsahib had gone into the house, and Jean looked up at me from a book.

"After the Agnostic, Marie Corelli," I said, reading the title; "from the silent velocity of the spinning top to the clatter of a falling pan! It's really wonderful how solemn villagers like the hysterical in fiction; I dare say Corelli has a larger constituency here than Dickens."

"Dickens was more stertorous in his hysterics," Jean answered. "Yes, Marie Corelli is hysterical; she is heretical, devotional, emotional, vivacious, dull, clever, stupid—I suppose she is intensely human—I mean she mirrors forms that we could find right here in our own village, speaking a

different language, a different cut to their coats; and some of Marie's people are altogether as small of soul—as vile in their Cainlike brotherhood as some we have."

"You are still listening, Jean, to the voices of the afternoon, the one voice. The Agnostic's tongue leaves a sting that festers. Why can't you remember just the beautiful, the simple discomfiture of the wise man by babes? That's really God's answer to such things—'by works shall ye know them.' Could the Agnostic, or the philosophic writers he quotes from, create one alleviating panacea for the heart-sickness of the world?"

"The life here is beautiful, Doctor; the children keep my heart from starving; I sit in the shadow and they come with their little hands and draw me forth into the sunshine, and when their hands release me I go back into the vale of dark shades."

"But the shadow will be all sunshine when the Creator lets the full light in."

"When! yes. But why should God wait until it is too late? Why do graves yawn openly to close over drunkards too late? Why was my brother born to go down the aisle of life between pews holding saintly ones pointing the finger of scorn at him? What has He done for me? Since I was born I have heard little else but talk of church and worship and death, and I have tried to accept what the others profess to take with closed eyes of belief. Why do I now doubt—why can't I accept it as His wise will—what have I left undone that a human being could have done to become reconciled to God's will? I believe I sacrificed my earthly self to save my soul. My husband did give himself absolutely to the Lord's work, and could the Lord help him—did He try?"

"I don't understand, Jean."

"No, you don't; you don't know, and you think I'm rebellious through lack of grace. But what is to soften me? If the Maker's love is a relentless persecuting semblance of hate and destruction how am I to incline my heart toward Him?"

"I must keep the Agnostic away, Jean," I said firmly; "he's doing you harm."

"The Agnostic is as powerless, as ineffectual one way or the other, as are the revilers or the consolers across the way; just words they utter, meaningless words. It is the terrible actualities, the fearful ruin of the bodies and souls of those I love that burns my heart to ash, and withers my own soul till it is but a torturing spirit."

Jean saw in my eyes the pain her words caused, and the heart she had spoken of as ash throbbed warm and generous in an instant. She put her hand on my arm, and leaned her face close under mine, her big black eyes welled full of tears as she pleaded: "Forgive me—I pain you; I am weak, miserably ungrateful for your care. O my God! how can I keep in faith or hope! You would pity me more than you do if I could tell you everything, but I can't—I can't; I'm so alone!"

"You're with friends, Jean; you're not alone."

"I know I have friends here at the Hedge, but I am like a stranger in a great city; he sees faces and forms—they throng about him—they encompass him on every side, but he can't go to them and lay his heart bare."

"If it will do you good, Jean, you can confide in me, tell me everything."

"I can't—I can't! I must just sit in solitude—there is no one."

"There is God," I said.

"No, not even Him. I cannot be a hypocrite, ask Him to help me, and rebellion in my heart. I have been tried till I am broken. Nothing but destruction for all that I love. I am like Rachael weeping in the wilderness for her children —desolate; and out of the wilderness come not words of Christian sympathy, but a mocking echo like the voice of Bildad the Shuhite crying to Job that the affliction the Lord had put upon him was because of his sins. Here in the village are many Bildads seeking to put shame upon the name of a man who wore his soul threadbare to make clear the way of righteousness to them."

At once I knew. I sprang to my feet and paced the lawn, schooling my mind to words that would take the sting out of this serpent touch. Jean had at last heard of the village gossip, I knew.

"That can't be so," I said at last in desperation; "they couldn't speak ill of Neil. Confide in me," I pleaded; "tell me what it is."

She handed me a letter, saying: "Read this, please, Doctor, and tell me what I am to do. I must have some one to talk to me about it. My mind is now drowning in a sea of troubles—I must cling to somebody or I shall sink."

Jean left me, passing swiftly into the house, and I knew that the fierce storm that raged in her heart had driven up a rain of tears. It would be a blessed relief.

I apostrophized the letter—"So *you* are the lurking devil." Unopened it scorched my hand—its poison oozed through the falsely dainty envelope. "A she-devil's work!" I muttered—"the heartlessness of the sisterhood!"

The mauve-colored envelope suggested to me the blue-

cowled monkshood that flaunts its purple bells above a poisoned stalk upon the western plains. With repugnance I drew forth the sheet, traced by a pen dipped in spat-out cobra's fluid. It was signed "A friend." Such a friend!

The subtle wording might have deceived a mind less acutely attuned by trial than Jean's, but even I saw that some one, draped in the tartan of clanship, stabbed. I hid the accursed thing in my pocket and sat unutterably moody and depressed, thinking.

The Memsahib's voice roused me, saying: "What has happened to Jean? I heard her sobbing in her room, but she did not answer to my knock—what is it, husband?"

"She has had a letter——"

"From Neil—from her husband—has she heard?"

"No, it's from a Witch of Endor." I drew Jean's letter from my pocket, but the Memsahib fended it away with her hand, saying: "I won't touch it—no, no! Tell me what is in it."

"It's about Bain; and that people are blaming her for keeping up the split in the church—keeping the pulpit open through Bain."

"What does Jean say?"

"She's in revolt against everything. She's like a runaway horse, galloping blind."

"Does she blame anyone for it?"

"Yes."

"Whom?"

"God."

"God! What are you saying, husband?"

"Yes, she blames Him for everything—and the Church."

"It's the Agnostic's fault," Memsahib declared.

"No, it's the fault of the Believers. She places as little reliance on the Agnostic's deductions as I do; but Jean's a woman of strong feeling, and she's fighting in the only way she thinks she can."

"Give me the letter; I'll ask Jean to burn it."

"If we could only burn the witch that sent it. For want of that sacrificial offering I think I'll burn this tempestuous book. Marie Corelli and her spiritual exotics are not the best thing for Jean in her present state," I declared, picking up the novel.

"Nonsense! Jean has read her Bible and I'll trust in that inspired book to hold its own against all others. Give me the novel, I'll take it up to Jean. It might rain and spoil it."

Little the Memsahib cared about the destruction of one of Marie Corelli's novels, I knew, but it was a curious evil that she couldn't turn into a path of good, and this would be utilized as a plea for entry to Jean's room, with much gentle consoling sympathy.

At nine o'clock in the evening Bain called just long enough to tell me about the meeting of the elders.

"Man, but they were obdurate," he said. "Those that were for keeping the pulpit for Munro had been forced to give in for the sake of peace in the church, and were for extending a call to the Reverend Grey. The best I could do was a compromise, a month as we are, with Supply, and then, if Neil is not found, we're to give Grey a call. I got the month by standing out against the little busybody; then I agreed to having him in exchange for a month's wait."

CHAPTER X

IT was after this fashion that days succeeded each other at Lilac Hedge. They were like a weather indicator that varied its color with atmospheric change, some bright—the days that were left to ourselves were like this—and some darkened by an evil atmosphere surcharged with enmity. And all the time absolute silence from the mystery; no decisive note either of hope or despair.

The Hedge life might have been styled a battle between the sustaining influence of materialism and the depressing effect of a somber spiritualism that hovered over our heads, a dark, rainless cloud. Some finality from this shroud of mystery, like a fierce downpour of rain from the ominous cloud, would have cleared the atmosphere.

One day by chance I overheard a discussion on these lines between Jean and the Memsahib. They had drifted into it casually through Jean speaking gratefully of how everybody at the Hedge strove to cast sunshine into her life. Not only because of the unsolvable mystery enshrouding her husband's disappearance, but because of the unborn babe, Jean's present condition of mind was pessimistic, morbid, deepening the actual shadows, and feeling less of warmth from the sunshine;

so from a pleased recital of the many little things that were always turning up as helps, she passed into a criticism of the inefficacy of that which should have been her real sustaining force — Christianity, or specifically the Church and the Church people.

This was particularly distressing to the Memsahib; not only on account of her faith in God's wise protective power, but because of its ultimate evil effect upon Jean's peace of mind. So she combated the morbid one's reflections sturdily. I heard her saying in a resolute, well-modulated tone: "Jean, the very things you speak of as being helpful, are they not of God's ordering too? Is He only a Being of shadow—does He only exist in the present trials you have, and which will pass away? Is not the sunshine His; the flowers; the beautiful little valley with its silver stream where you were almost happy the other day? If we help brighten your life here are not we of God's creation—does not He give us the power to do the little we have done? The children, are not they of the Creator's giving? And your own baby, Jean——"

I saw the Memsahib put her hand upon Jean's cheek, and turn her face within reach of a kiss—"hasn't God been merciful and kind to you to give you something sweet to live for? And when your baby is in your arms I know what you'll do, Jean; you'll just thank Him for the gift. And that little baby will do for you just what the infant Christ did for the world—reconcile you to your Maker. That one thought should keep you safe from all doubts, make you brave to stand all that may come to you in your hour of trial."

What sophistical logic could stand against that plea? It seemed to me that the Memsahib's wise purity of thought was like the undimable beauty of the Pleiades in their unchange-

able path across the heavens, beautiful beyond count and inexorably steadfast, so unchangeable. As it is in the book of Job: "Canst thou bind the sweet influence of the Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?"

Listening shed a new light upon the value of that which I had deemed but a casual transpiring of little happenings. Were we all stars in a firmament of destiny following out an ordered routine, or was it just the necromancy of Memsahib's simple earnestness that gilded the trivial episodes with the gold leaf of dignified value?

In fact, I needed the mental tonic that carried in her words, almost as much as did Jean, for I was beginning to find this forced absorption in the small things of daily life making sad inroads into my power of, what I was pleased to call, real work. My novel which Doctor Monteith had praised so valiantly had, owing to its comatose state in the book market, all but guillotined my prospects. Publishers—caring little for merit, that is, the merit which every author believes his work holds—are indissolubly wedded to the monetary value of a book; the public are the sole arbiters of the penman's fate, unless, of course, he is either so rich that he can continue his writing as a pleasurable exercise, or so poor that he is willing to die at any time and leave the books to wait for the generation they are written for. Of course, even then, it is but an advanced section of the omnipotent Public.

But there, sitting by the open window, surrounded by my defeated literary soldiers, I stole a portion of the stimulus of bravery that Memsahib was lavishing, out of her fullness, upon Jean, and formulated a heterogeneous plan. I would keep pegging away with the quill, and impress into our mis-

sion of sustaining Jean all the episodes of distraction I could lay hands upon, accidental or premeditated.

Thus alert, these wished-for mind simples came tumultuously, and I built a barricade of them to wall out the skeleton.

One day we made a discovery that, in the spring, David had planted Memsahib's bulbs upside down. Lilies long overdue are an invisible irritant, generally ending in a delve of discovery; and Memsahib, who had faithfully watered the abiding place of these sluggish tubulars, her patience now exhausted, solved the mystery with a trowel. There were the blanched shoots of the rare bulbs patiently retracing their steps, after a futile journey downward in search of the home of their infancy, China.

We all laughed — even Jean — except Memsahib, who looked very reproachfully at David.

David was general handy man about the village, considerably more of an expert at spade work than artistic gardening. Indeed his very excelling profession was sawing wood; he held some sort of a record for this, having sawn and split a cord of wood in a fabulously short time in a competition.

David was present when Memsahib unearthed the reversed bulbs and seemed as much astonished and perplexed as anyone could well be. He took off his straw hat, rubbed a hand across his wrinkled brow, puckered his lips, and at first could only think of his favorite expression, "Well I'm goldanged! if that don't beat all!"

This suggested something else and he added: "And me so careful wit' 'em, too. I remember as well as if 'twas yesterday, I wet me thumb and rubbed the pimply end of that root

a-lookin' fer the seed pod." He illustrated this by rubbing his chin. Something came of this process, for he brightened up with a plausible explanation of the mystery. "Well, I'm gol-danged—I might a-knowed! I don't like to say nothin' about a man in the same line of business, but I'll bet anything *I* know the very duck as turned 'em roots over. I ain't mentionin' no names"—and David winked solemnly at me—"but he done it right 'nough. 'Tain't the first dirty trick he's played me."

As old Joe Haney was the only other "man in the same line o' business," we felt that he stood convicted. At any rate, David trudged away quite satisfied that he had turned his unfortunate mistake to profitable account, and had put a spoke in his rival's wheel.

Some of our household was always having more or less business with David. I think as a rule the profit leaned his way, while the lightsome pleasure was ours.

His own little garden fairly bristled with old-fashioned flowers, and literally, David considered that a bloom would smell as sweet by any other name, for he spoke of the nasturtiums as the "excursions," poppies—this was excusable—were "puppies," and the magnolia tree that bloomed on my premises caused him many a rapturous tribute to its beautiful "regalia blossoms." He always spoke of the shrubs as "scrubs"; the nicotine, in spite of its immaculate purity-suggesting white flowers, to David was "Nicodemus," alyssum was "Lizzie 'em." In fact he had a wonderful vocabulary of popular names.

David would have made a great political economist. With the little house he had rented the land was thrown in as of no account. Having the land, David borrows a horse from

one man, a plow from another, and, lo! he has a garden. Then he acquires seed potatoes on shares.

This summer he and Doo-doo combined over a wondrous deal. David had a clutch of bantam eggs from somebody, to hatch out on royalty, but no hen to undertake the job. One of my Plymouth Rocks, possessed of the mother instinct, had made herself so great a nuisance, interfering with her sisters who were keeping our table supplied, that she had been given two door knobs and a glass egg in a nest all by herself.

Her ready acceptance of these unfecundible toys conveyed the impression that Burroughs is right, that animals are not as wise as we think them.

I believe that David had his eye on this hen when he acquired that clutch of tiny eggs, for he fired Doo-doo's imagination with the delight of having a pair of "banties," until she borrowed the old hen from me, and formed a partnership with the gardener.

If the old hen had known anything of ornithology, I am sure she would have thought that a cuckoo had deceived David and herself when the brood of tiny chicks swarmed about her like overgrown sparrows.

This deal fructified into a distraction for Lilac Hedge when David brought Doo-doo her allotment, a chipper little cock and a demure gray hen creature. But the dwellers in the hen village, which was the stable and yard, were as cruel as humans: they would none of the small strangers. Among themselves the big full-bodied Rocks picked at and bullied each other, but they all united in aversion to the helpless mites. Instead of joy the banties brought sorrow and tears to sympathetic Doo-doo. Indeed, their condition was pitiful;

they were like two child waifs thrown on the tender mercy of a city. In pity I built a cage for them, and they were installed in a corner of the veranda, and soon were as much at home as the dogs, or the cricket, the cage door often left open for them to stretch their legs.

The rooster told us his name was "Chuck"; many times a day he repeated it, "Chuck, chuck, chuck, chuck, chuck!" and his wee brown wife would plaintively add, "I am Pee-wee, pee-wee, pee-wee!"

The day Chuck discovered me in my study—we had become great friends—he was filled with joy. "Chuck, chuck! here he is—here he is!" he yelled; and the wife—she had wandered far down the dark cavern of the hall—came on the run, crying, "Pee-wee, pee-wee!"

I liked them, because any little misdemeanor was soon put right, and they told me no temper-trying stories of scandal, and, I knew, considered me quite as great a man as was anywhere in the world.

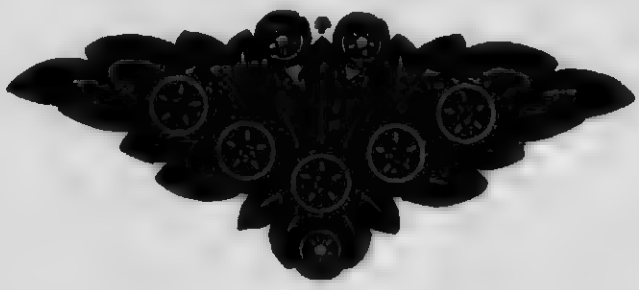
It was something to lift Jean out of a brooding fit, to call her to see Chuck roosted on my chair, or, in the evening, when he should have been in bed, bathing himself in the glow of my grate fire.

She even laughed a strong audible chuckle at sight of Chuck on one of my knees, and Blitz on the other, the terrier tremendously jealous. I was really a Mountebank, a psychological juggler, pitting little simples of this order against such mighty interests as Jean's heart-trying bereavement, and her floundering in the slough of theological despond.

My idea was to leave those two subjects alone, if I could, believing, with the Memsahib, that when Jean's baby came

we could all give a great sigh of relief, knowing that the wise gossips, and harsh fate had all been confounded.

The mystery over Neil would clear itself up or not just as God decreed. All that could be done in the way of finding him had been, and was being done.



CHAPTER XI

WHEN I told the Memsahib of Bain's month of grace—just four Sabbaths in which the pulpit would be held casual, she gave way to a fit of despair; the tears welled up, and made violet the blue-gray of her eyes.

"I knew there was something in the air," she said, "something dreadful, I felt so blue. If it were longer—three months, it wouldn't matter, not in the same way."

"What will be the effect on Jean?" I asked. "Perhaps her revolt against the Church will lessen the force of this blow."

"It won't, I fear. She'll take it that they've given up hope of Neil's being alive; that's what I'm thinking of. And it is hard enough for her to bear up. At any rate I won't have the Rev. Grey coming to the Hedge."

Alas for the Memsahib's unwillingness to entertain the probationer, Grey, he, meddlesome as Bain had described him, quite took the matter out of our hands by assuming the rôle of spiritual consoler to the wife of him he was pleased to call "his dear colleague in the ministry." In reality he was seeking to soften his own nest with the down of her quiescent acceptance of his Pastorate.

It was the day following his first temporal occupation of the pulpit that he called upon Jean, to impress upon her the solace that was to be found in a meek acceptance of the cross God had put upon her.

Unfortunately for his mission, Jean detected that he had been primed and was really come to school her, and for his own benefit.

I think he was a bigot, Bain had hinted as much. Jean knew as well as we did that she needed buoying up with hope. I think she would have clutched eagerly at even false hope.

"Tell me that Neil is not dead—say it again!" That was the cry of her desolate heart; and when the narrow little schemer talked of resignation, she gave him an uncomfortable quarter of an hour.

I didn't hear it, nobody did, for we had discreetly left them alone in my study. In fact, I rather fancied the rousing of combative energy in Jean would do her good; the little minister would help her in a way he had not intended.

However, his face told the story of his non-success, as he left, and the tails of his black coat appeared to jerk anathemas at the depraved people of Lilac Hedge as he stalked crossly up the street.

Jean had been strong enough for the officious minister, but when he had gone inevitable reaction cast her prone, face buried in a pillow, where she was found by the Memsahib.

The Reverend Grey was still in sight as the Agnostic came leisurely along under the maples, and leaned up against my gate, nodding to me pleasantly as I stood on the lawn. I believe he had been waiting for the departure of the minister.

"Yon is a sample of a man's serving two masters," the

Agnostic observed; "he's credited to the Lord, but casts a number of fish into the Devil's net, I'm thinking."

"I thought you didn't believe in the Devil," I answered.

"I was speaking figuratively," he replied. "I mean that busybody has a little hell of his own that he draws people into. And the worst of it is, I believe he's kind of honest in it; he's built in proportion—his soul, and his heart, and his mind are cast in a small mold, like himself. He shoves his religion down people's throats, and if they don't swallow it he thumps them on the back. I've seen more than one man, half-strangled by his dose of threatened God's anger, spew it up again, and swear he'd rather have the disease than the cure. He'll suit some of them here fine, though. He's a grand hand at church dogmas; and he'll give them long sermons. He's fond of the rattle of his own tin-pan voice."

"He has been saying a few words to Mrs. Munro," I remarked.

"Well, I hope he had the good sense to try to brighten her up a bit, but it's almost certain he didn't."

"Say, Doctor, the Major here's got yon little man down pretty fine."

I turned half crossly at Sweeny's words. The teamster had been putting in a load of coal, and coming with the bill, had evidently stood behind my back listening to the Agnostic's remarks.

But the twinkle in Sweeny's blue Irish eyes was always sufficient to disarm resentment with me.

"Oh, I know you Reverend duck purty well," Sweeny added, seeing himself unchecked; "the Major's ticked him off to a turn. It was him made all the trouble down to Plympton tryin' to bury a man afore he was dead."

"That's a grewsome subject for a joke, Sweeny," I remonstrated.

"I tell you, b'ys, it's no joke, it's the God's truth. I was there mesilf at the time. Jack Cavanagh that kept the tavern at Kelly's Corners eight miles beyond Plympton, got hurted wit' a runaway team, an' he was purty bad. A man comes up to the Corners from Plympton Saturday mornin' an' says Jack ain't got an hour to live.

"Minister Grey—Man alive! you couldn't have a litter of pups born in Plympton but he'd know of it—he gets to hear that Cavanagh is dyin'. Then he gets frettin' fer fear the Sabbath'd be desecrated by diggin' a grave Sunday if they waited to hear final from Kelly's Corners. You see, b'ys, Cavanagh'd have to be tuk up to Plympton fer plantin'. So the Minister tells old man Woolly that's in charge of the buryin' ground, to dig a grave fer Cavanagh; an' Woolly, thinkin' Cavanagh is dead, tells everybody. You see it was terrible hot weather, fierce! I 'member I was hauling gravel on the Town line, an' the horses'd sweat standing still till there'd be little puddles of water at their feet. Well, that's what their hurry was about, he'd have to be buried Sunday. So all his friends in Plympton—an' he had a swarm of 'em—passes the word, an' goes off down to Kelly's Corners fer the funeral. I'm not sure, but I think the undertaker got word an' went. Anyway—to make a long story short, there was Cavanagh sittin' up in bed takin' nourishment, just cheatin' the hole in the ground they dug fer him. An' he got all right, too. Snakes! but there was a row about that, and no mistake!"

Laughing at the success of his story, the teamster made off; a few minutes later the Agnostic followed him.

Making all allowance for the Agnostic's cynical overrating of professing Christians' uncharitableness, I felt that his summing up of Grey's character had been true in the main, and that the latter's advent would not lessen the mischievous scandals.

These thoughts were painfully confirmed the next evening.

Miss Harkett whisked in to us at the Hedge, her beautiful wavy gray hair vibrating with electrical disturbance.

"My, my!" whispered the Memsahib to me, "Teacher is excited; something has happened; it puts me all on edge when she comes in that state."

"And Jean will absorb telepathically this nervous demoralization," I whispered back. "Hurry up, capture Teacher; rush her into my study, and let her unload the terrible something."

Miss Harkett had stopped to shake hands with Jean. I heard her saying something, and she appeared nervous and excited.

"For Heaven's sake! grab her before she lets the cat out of the bag," I muttered.

"Are you going in, Mrs. Cameron?" Teacher said as Memsahib rose.

"Yes, will you come too? we'll talk about that hymn."

They disappeared through the door. I could hear the drone of their voices in my room, and presently the Memsahib called, asking where I had put the matches, she wanted a light.

"Brilliant idea!" I whispered to myself, "with match safes all over the house." I went in, knowing that I was wanted.

"Close the door, please," Memsahib commanded. "What do you suppose has happened now?" she asked next.

"The Kirk's gone over to Rome," I answered. I knew that only Church matters agitated little Teacher to the edge of collapse.

"They're saying that Jean is an atheist."

"Indeed they are," Teacher confirmed.

"Who are *they*?"

"The Sewing Circle Set," Memsahib answered.

"But, my dear girl, that's what they meet for—to crucify somebody, isn't it? The last victim was that poor girl whom they drove out of town until she really did go wrong. You know who I mean—Miss—Miss——"

"This is worse," the Memsahib interrupted me.

"Of course, it's worse to us—it comes nearer home."

"Miss Harkett was there and heard them, so there's no mistake about it," Memsahib declared.

"It was just dreadful!" wailed little Teacher. "Mrs. MacFarlane declared Jean was like Peter, that she denied the Lord—and to Minister Grey's own face."

"So much the worse for Grey—it's his fault," I commented.

"And Mrs. McRae said that she was learning pagan signs and things from the Agnostic. And Mrs. MacMillan said that Malcolm Bain was always about her, and that she was putting him up to making trouble in the Church."

"You mean Widow MacMillan," I said—"she set her cap for Bain, and worried the poor man's life so that I was afraid he'd have to marry her or leave the country. It's just jealousy with her."

"Grandma Murdock settled them," cried the Memsahib gleefully.

"Indeed she did — the dear old body!" confirmed Teacher.

"Good for Grandma! How did she shut them up—she must have called out the hose reel."

"When Mrs. MacFarlane said that Jean denied the Lord, Grandma turned on her—My! she is such a gentle old body I could hardly believe my ears when I heard it—she told Mrs. MacFarlane she ought to be ashamed to say such a thing—that Jean was a good woman, a better Christian than many of those that prayed long and loud in public."

"How do you know that?" snapped Widow MacMillan.

"'Yes, how do you know Jean Munro's a God-fearing woman,' asked Mrs. MacRae; 'she's that proud she'll speak to nobody, cutting her betters. Does she confide in you, Mrs. Murdock?'

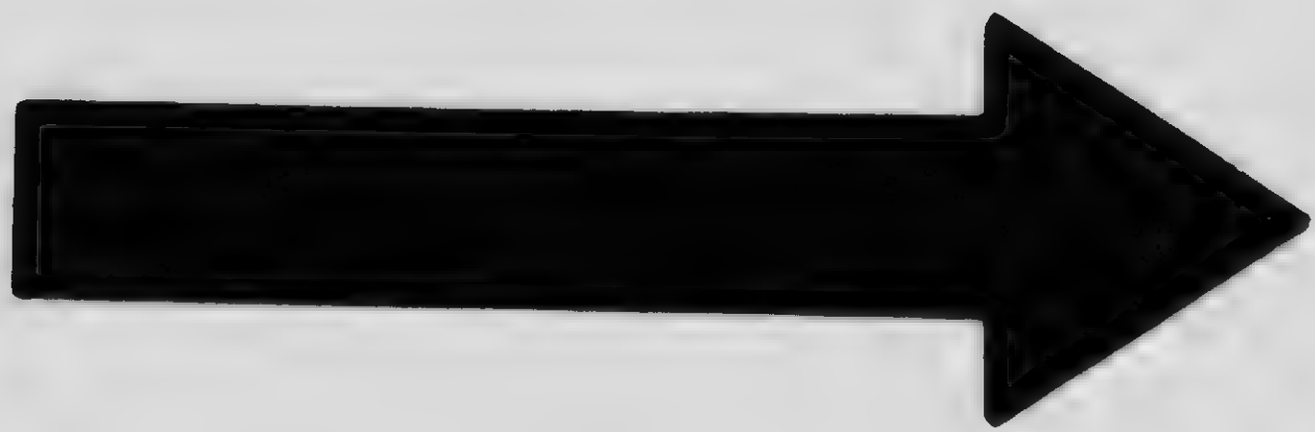
"'She does with her troubles what you ought to do, she takes them to the Lord and not to the town pump; and not when people are looking to say how holy she is, either.'"

"Good for Grandma—splendid!" I exclaimed enthusiastically.

"You should have seen the vindictive look on Mrs. MacRae's face, for it was a home thrust," said Teacher.

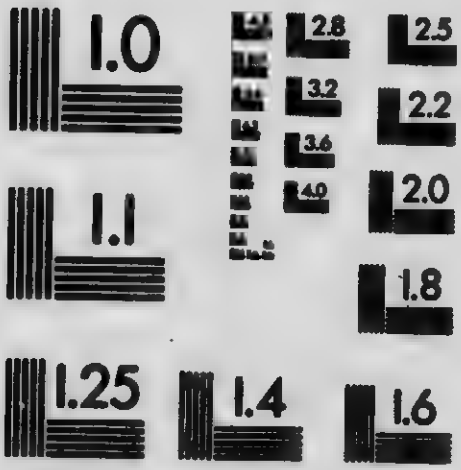
"'And how do you know that Mrs. Munro takes her trouble to the Lord in prayer if there's no one to see her do it, Mrs. Murdock?' sneered Mrs. MacMillan; and the others laughed spitefully, thinking they had her trapped.

"'I'll tell you how I know,' went on Grandma; 'it is a sacred private thing, but thank goodness you can't make scandal of it if I do tell you. Mrs. Munro's bedroom at the Hedge



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faces my kitchen, and often when I'm busy there at night I can see her against the blind. And if you'll just clean your minds while I tell it, 'cause it's a sacred thing, I've seen her shadow as she knelt beside her bed in prayer. Not a dip down and up again, but as long as some of you bow your heads in church. Now, tell me, would an atheist do that—or one that denied the Lord?'"

"Good for Grandma!" I reiterated, my heart just warm for the faithful old body.

"They hadn't a word to say," added Teacher. "But Widow MacMillan—she's spiteful—wouldn't let up about the other matter. She said: 'It's common talk that Neil Munro was jealous of Malcolm Bain—and I don't wonder at it.'"

"I'll bet Grandma scored them over that, too, didn't she?" I was eager to know.

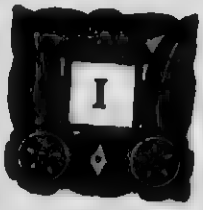
"Mrs. Murdock turned on the Widow like a flash and said: 'You ought to be ashamed! You had a good man yourself, and you're a mother, and I'll tell you something else to still your nasty tongues——'"

Miss Harkett stopped abruptly, and looked hopelessly at Memsahib.

"What did she say—" I began, with great stupidity; but the Memsahib frowned at me, and I stepped over to turn down the lamp a little—it was smoking. "By Jove!" I said, "it's a wonder the chimney didn't break."

This diversion gave little Teacher a chance; she was quite flustered. I turned from the lamp, that was really all right, and walked out on the lawn.

CHAPTER XII



I HAD seen nothing of Robert Craig for three days; in fact, I had thought little of this, for on two or three occasions during the past month he had suddenly disappeared from Iona for a couple of days. I had taken a pessimistic view of these physical elisions, surmising that they were drinking bouts in York, for the poor boy appeared utterly incapable of restraint.

It was about ten o'clock on the morning following the visit of Miss Harkett that Malcolm Bain came to the Hedge, and I could see from his affected casuality of manner that there was something in the wind.

Jean was in the hammock, and the Memsahib had the veranda looking like an auctioneer's mart with rugs and chairs, while the open door and the swish of an active broom within proclaimed that it was sweeping day.

"I came to tell you that you've been appointed a delegate jointly with me to represent the society at York," Bain said presently, and from the pitch of his voice, which was usually low, I knew that this was meant more for Jean's ears than for mine. As I belonged to no secret society I was naturally fuddled over Bain's enigmatical message. Luckily I caught his

eye, and there a ponderous wink promptly initiated me into whichever order he had pitched upon as an excuse for carrying me off to York.

"That's really too bad," I objected, falling in with his humor; "I'm busy."

"Oh, it'll not take you away for long," he replied cheerfully; "we'll be back to-morrow."

"When do we start?" I asked.

"At noon."

"Well, I suppose I must go," I said resignedly; "I'll tell the Memsahib. Won't you come into my study, Bain? I'd like to get a line on what I'm to do at the meeting."

"Now what is it?" I asked when we were beyond Jean's hearing.

Bain handed me a telegram. It had been sent from Buffalo by Robert, and read:

"Come at once; found."

"Minister?" I said inquiringly.

"Yes; or Robert has been soaking in the accursed drink till he's fair daft. Will you go, Doctor?"

We were in Buffalo that same night at nine o'clock, and back in Iona the next afternoon. Just one more frowsed thread pulled from the tangled woof of Mystery. Nothing definite—nothing but a battered water-logged body, all that remained of some man in whose pocket had been found a pulpy card with the name "Munro" upon it. There was a flushed, heavy-eyed boy, Robert, who insisted that the dead man was Neil. But the trail down which the now dead had glided, traced back by the sleuths, led not to the shadow of any kirk, but to the Devil's playground, and I wondered that Robert did not hold this as proof that the dead man could not be Neil.

"It is impossible that the horrible thing we saw was Minister," I said to Bain; "it is too indefinite—too unsolvable for us to even mention it; we must hold that Neil is alive until there is no doubt over his death; we must swear to secrecy about this foolish find of Robert's—he's just queer with so much dissipation, and fancies things. If we were but to mention the card on that body in Iona, rumor would write it that we had been with Neil in his last moments—that we had buried him. Think what a terrible thing it would be if he were to come back alive after that—it would be like Eugene Aram."

A troubled look in Bain's face startled me into a recognition of what import might be put upon my words.

"There are so many cases where men have been reported dead and have come back," I added hastily. "and it would be such a terrible blow to Jean, all the more ...ous if it were untrue."

Journeying back to Iona my mind had recurred over and over again to Robert's peculiar actions the day we visited the manse. This unpleasant feeling had almost died out, but now it broke forth again distractingly. I determined to confide in Malcolm—indeed, perhaps I should have done so before, for with him, whatever there was of a secret in it would be as inviolate as with myself. So I related all the circumstances of Robert's peculiar actions that day. Put into words it really sounded very little, nothing at all as it impressed me, aug...ed by hardly shaped suspicions.

"W... better have another look through the manse," Bain said practically. "I expect that Robert was just a bit flighty. When a man's pretty well soaked in alcohol his mind is like a rain cloud, just drives here and there, whichever way

the wind blows. To tell you the truth," he continued, "this hunt for Minister has been carried on in the wrong way from the start; there was never any system pursued—too many cooks spoiling the broth; and at first no cooks at all just, for Mrs. Munro, naturally enough, not thinking that her husband was gone for good, said nothing for a day. Then came the reports that he'd been seen going away on the train. These were believed till they were found out to be false. I think myself that he did go away, but there's no proof. And the absence of proof in this direction is confusing. How could a man, well known, like Munro, get away without somebody seeing him? It seems impossible. We did search the country hereabouts, but we were late starting, and at that it was more a matter of form, for we all thought that he was away and would turn up at some place, or come back."

"Is there another key to the manse?" I asked Bain. "It might disquiet Jean if we went to her for the key."

"Yes, MacKay has one in charge; I'll get it."

When we returned home I ran the gantlet of a severe trial. Before I had a chance to tell the Memsahib the real business we were away upon, she, abetted by Jean, put me through a jocose catechism about the meeting of the secret society I was supposed to have attended. This illustrated absolutely the constant overlapping of the tragic and the comic in our lives; the heavy heart behind the mask of smiling lips, the laugh that smothered a sigh.

Bain and I went together to MacKay, and in answer to Malcolm's request, Donald said: "Yes, I've got a key o' the manse."

After a search in his desk he added petulantly: "I wonder

if that careless young deevil brought it back, it doesna' appear to be whaur it belongs, i' yon pigeonhole. I'm vera particular over Church property; a man should no trifle wi' the Lord's belongings, and I wish others would just think the same."

MacKay was angry now. He tossed papers about—he even searched his pockets. I saw him looking in the stamp box. This was characteristic of MacKay; when excited he added to the trouble in hand by worry.

"Man alive!" he exclaimed as we waited patiently. "It's like when I used to lend my trout-rod; I'd no' come by it again till I went after it."

"Who had the key?" Malcolm asked, as MacKay, utterly nonplussed, stood in front of us, hands thrust deep in his trousers pockets, and face puckered with angry disgust.

"Who had it—let me see? I wonder if I left it home, I wonder if he brought it to the house." Malcolm's question had been driven, half-answered, from the Scot's mind by his perturbation over the missing article.

"Who had the key from you?" Malcolm repeated stolidly.

"Who had it?—that's what I'm asking mysel'. Who was it now? Was it Minister Grey?—No. Did you get it yourself frae me, Malcolm?"

"Indeed I didn't! I'd have returned it if I had."

"Of course you would, man; you're vera particular, Bain, I might ha'e known that. It would be just such a reckless, godless lot as yon Robert Craig that would ha'e just treated the key o' the manse—to the residence of God's minister, like he would an empty beer bottle, to be thrown away when done for."

"Was it Robert got the key?" Malcolm queried impatiently.

"Aye, the very man! you've said it, Malcolm!"

Bain and I glanced at each other. I suppose there was a startled look in my eyes, there certainly was an enigmatical expression in his.

"Why didn't you say so before, man?" he asked MacKay.

"Aye, just that; it fair slipped my mind, bothered by the loss o' the key. I remember vera well when he brought it back——"

"He did bring it back then?" Malcolm asked.

"Aye; at least I'm thinkin' he did. I remember putting it down here where I stamp the letters—I was just closing the mail for Kintyre, and was in a hurry—and where is it now? that's what I'd like to ken."

"It might have got shoved in there under the pads, behind the shelf," Malcolm advised; "look there, MacKay."

The pads were brushed to one side, some of them clattering to the floor; letters and papers were swirled into a whirlwind, and then, with a yell of triumph, MacKay dragged forth the big brass key, adding complacently: "I knew it couldna be lost; I'm vera particular about Church property; everyone should be. Here it is, Malcolm. Be sure and bring it back. And yon careless de'il'll no get it again, I promise you that. All this worry just because when you lend a man a thing he thinks you ha'e no further use for it."

"I wonder what Robert was needing the key for?" I said, as we walked to the manse.

"Most likely it was to get something for his sister," Bain answered.

"In that case she would have given him her own key," I reasoned. "I don't like it at all. The boy is certainly hiding something in his mind."

"He hid something in his pocket, you say, Doctor."

"Yes; what was that—what do you suppose that could have been, Malcolm?"

"I don't know. It may have been some compromising letter, some kindly disposed woman might have written to Munro about Robert."

There was a certain plausibility in Malcolm's suggestion, but somehow it had not the slightest validity with me. I had an intuitive feeling that whatever it was Robert had taken, it had to do with Munro's disappearance. I knew absolutely, it was like an inspiration, that soon or late I should find this true.

We went at once to the study. I led the way with feverish haste, dreading I knew not what. There would be some new evidence there, some change. Robert would not have gone there out of idle curiosity.

I searched the room like a detective, Bain contenting himself with a chair, saying, "I'll just wait, Doctor! I've not been here before."

I noticed that Neil's gloves were gone from where I had placed them on the desk; a smoking jacket that had hung on the door of a little closet was not there. On an open shelf, and attached to the wall, there was a collection of Indian curios which Munro had brought from that country. A brass prayer wheel from Thibet, with its enclosed long scroll of prayers printed in red ink, still lay upon the open shelf; but beside it was a blank space from which something had been taken. I remembered well that at the time of my former

visit this little shelf had been quite full. I tried to remember what had lain there. I ran over in my mind the odd Indian trinkets I had made a mental note of. An Afghan knife, with a jade handle, was certainly missing from where it had rested on two nails driven into the wall just above the prayer wheel. I had examined its long tapering point, sharp as a lance, and had said something of its vicious look to Robert the day we had been there together.

"What are you looking for, Doctor?" Bain asked presently.

"I'm trying to think what was on this shelf—it's gone."

"What's the difference?" he commented; "perhaps a trinket of just no value that Robert took a notion to. There's something on the floor by your foot," he added in the same breath—"what's that?"

I picked the object up. It was a small mouthpiece, fashioned from a bird's wing-bone evidently.

"It's like the reed of a bagpipe," Malcolm said, "but most like it's the stem of a tobacco pipe."

"I think it is," I answered, "and I'm sure there was a small Indian pipe here on the shelf."

"Well, I think we're wasting time," Malcolm said. "I suppose Robert took those things. Neil may have given them to him."

"There's been a fire in the grate since I was here," I commented, poking in the ashes.

"Perhaps there were more letters that Robert wished to destroy."

"But why did he burn the gloves and the coat?" I retorted, showing a leather thumb and some buttons. I darted to the desk with something else in my hand. "And even

Munro's pens, they're gone. Here are nibs I fished out of the ashes."

"Why should the boy burn those," Malcolm queried. "It's mighty strange."

"It has something to do with that peculiar odor I told you about, Malcolm."

"It's strange," Bain said solemnly. "That black-faced wooden god, with the many arms, grinning on the shelf gives me a creepy feeling."

"That's *Kali*, the Goddess of Cholera, the evil consort of Siva the Destroyer," I explained. "And this mystery that hangs over Neil's fate is just like her devilish reputation."

"I don't like these pagan things; they' ke false gods," Malcolm declared with a grimace of disgust. "I suppose it was these queer implements of darkness that stirred the imagination of Maggie, Jean's servant, for she spread some strange yarns about Munro—it wouldn't take much cloth to make an overcoat of scandal in I ia, though; half an egg shell, and there's a mare's nest with three dozen eggs in."

"What was Maggie's story—I never heard of that?"

"I just came by snatches of it, a word here and a word there—that Neil used to shut himself up for a whole day or longer, and the girl thought he was making magic."

"I suppose he was studying," I said; "he was a great student."

"Likely taking refuge in his Bible, and praying for strength to bend the necks of the Philistines to the yoke. It was here that Neil and Robert had the quarrel the night before Minister walked out into the great silence."

"What did they quarrel about, Malcolm?"

"I don't know—nobody knows. I suppose Robert must

have come to Neil drunken; perhaps Minister upbraided him for it. It was Maggie who told of the row. At any rate, Robert was drinking heavily the day Minister disappeared, and he had been free from the accursed thing for months before."

"I am sure that Robert was the cause of Neil's going," I said. "I wouldn't utter this thought to anyone but yourself, Bain. We'll just keep silence over this suspicion. If it were whispered through the village I believe it would kill Jean in her present condition."

"Yes, her mind is sore troubled; she's swimming in a sea of calamity. Just a false repor that her brother was suspected of anyth ng might put her out of her mind."

"It isn't the mind alone, Malcolm."

Nothing but love could have flashed the look of tender concern from the Scot's strong eyes.

"Jean expects to become a mother," I answered.

If I had been a black-capped judge passing sentence of death upon Bain, if I had been an elder rising in church to denounce him as a heretic, my words could not have wrought a greater change in his countenance. Bain's strong features writhed in a struggle with tremendous emotion—his face darkened till his eyes became lurid in wrath. For a full minute I watched him in the play of this fierce emotion.

"The hound! the miserable cowardly hound!"

I understood. Malcolm's passion became beatified. I had almost misunderstood it. It was concern intensified by the knowledge that a man could have deserted Jean at that time of all others.

"Yes, Malcolm," I said, speaking at last, "you're justified in your execration, if the husband, rational, sane, went away

giving no sign. But to my mind this proves one of two things; he was either insane through overwork—physically broken to mental distraction, or else he is dead——"

"My God! the poor girl! If the people who know this say slanderous things of her they must be devils incarnate. Thank God, Doctor, I'm strong enough to stand up for her, and blest with enough to see that neither she nor the little one ever wants. I never valued the money I came by much till now. I'll tell you, Doctor"—Bain came over beside me and laid his hand on my shoulder—"I can trust you, man, and I'd like to say what's in my heart for just once; it seems a fitting time. It's good for a man to let out the truth when it can do no harm, and when it will be heard in trust. I tell you I cursed the money. I worshiped Jean Craig, and I thought that perhaps she loved me better than other. I never spoke outright to her, I was afraid; I knew she was too good for me. Once or twice I was on the point of speaking, to chance my hopes, but something in her manner told me that I should fail. I was a coward—I was afraid; I came to think that it was the money stood between us, that Jean thought it was just a home with plenty I had to offer; and not a man's love. I couldn't word my thoughts in her presence, I was just a blundering man, rough of speech. Unfortunately I spoke of it once that way, about taking care of her, I never could put it right, even with myself. I'm awkward at all times, but with Jean I was like a man drunk.

"She was always proud—her father and her mother before her were that—and I couldn't explain that it was love and not pity. I know it was just because I was her father's friend, almost his only friend at the finish, that Jean thought I had taken upon myself to look after her future. Now I can

be just what she thought I was—her father's friend—and I'm satisfied. My! my! little Jean a mother—won't that be beautiful! It will be a blessing straight from God."

Bain had gradually passed from fierce passion to earnestness, and now to a sweet tenderness of thought like a woman's. I gazed with rapture upon the great human giant with his fine sensibility. A knight he was in his chivalry.

"A curious place we happened upon for this talk," Bain said simply, and, as I thought, as apology to the absent husband.

"It might have all been said with Munro present," I answered.

"Aye, perhaps! But you've finished your look-about, Doctor?"

A thought struck me and I slid open the drawer that Robert had forced the lock of, saying: "I first got that odor I spoke of here—the drawer reeked of it. That's curious," I continued, "some one has stripped this."

I pulled the drawer away from the desk and held it to my nostrils; there was still a faint nauseating odor clinging to its wood. I passed it to Malcolm, saying: "Do you detect anything?"

"Yes; there is a strange drug smell about it—a heathen taint like the smell of yon infidel prayer wheel."

"What do you think it is, Malcolm—have you any idea?"

"I've never got a whiff of the Devil's breath, but I think it would be a bit like this. Still I think you're putting too much store by it, Doctor, as a cause for consideration. What could it have to do with Neil's disappearance?"

I could see his eye searching my thoughts, as if he would

fathom something that I hesitated to express. I came back to my former argument that it must have a strong bearing on the mystery, because Robert, who knew something which we did not, had been forced into a lie through the desk drawer and its contents.

"Well, it's an elusive clew this, and will lead to nothing," Malcolm declared. "Hadn't we better be going?"

"I want to take a look through the house," I answered, "cellar and all. It will rest my mind."

We went down to the kitchen, Malcolm searching for a candle.

"It won't take us long, anyway," he said, with the light in his hand. "You look as though you expected to see a ghost, Doctor," he added at the bottom of the cellar stairs, holding the candle above his head, and scanning my face. "I declare you're white about the gills."

I answered with a nervous laugh, and he led the way into the coal cellar, and then into another storage room, containing nothing but barrels and tubs.

Suddenly I heard an exclamation of surprise from Bain. He had thrown open the door of a closet, and was holding a bottle between his eyes and the candle light. He put the bottle down and picked up another. This he replaced on the shelf, and stood rubbing his chin contemplatively.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Were you for a swig at the bottle and found it empty?"

"It's empty, right enough, and so is the other one. But there should be a dozen full ones here, and there are none."

"Full of what, Malcolm?"

"Communion wine for the sacrament." My silence carried him on with an explanation. "The thrifty elders of the

Kirk get it in bulk once a year, and it has always been stored here in the manse cellar. It was a good idea because I've known of an occasion where, through forgetfulness, there was no wine forthcoming for communion service. Man! it's lucky I discovered this shortage, for next Sabbath is communion, and we'd be depending on this for supply."

"What's become of it?" I queried.

"Aye, that's what's troubling me."

"Could somebody have broken in and stolen it?" I asked.

Malcolm pointed to the two empty bottles. "Besides," he said, "the house has not been broached."

"Somebody in the house drank it, you think? It couldn't have been Munro himself, he was bitter against drink. He even raised his voice in protest against having wine on the communion table," I protested.

"No, it wasn't Minister."

"Could it have been Robert?" I said hesitatingly. Then carried on by this train of thoughts, my mind groping for links in the broken chain, I added: "Robert was intoxicated the night he quarreled with Neil. Can it be possible that Munro caught him drinking this wine?"

"It's a dreadful thought," Malcolm answered heavily.

"But the boy's liquor had been shut off at the tavern, and I know from what I've seen of these weaklings that a man with a craving for strong drink will steal it when he'll steal nothing else. Without being a thief—if you can call it that—he'll steal liquor for the devil that is in his blood. Heavens, it's horrible! Isn't this guardianship of our brother's a terrible thing? Is it any wonder that the Devil seems to get the upper hand of the Lord when humans are the chessmen in the great game? Let's away into the open—

my soul is sick of this; let's out to the air. I want to blow my lungs full of the wind from the fields. God, man! I think that we were better when we dwelt in caves and gnawed at ones like animals."

We trudged silently up the cellar stairs and out into the sunshine, and then Malcolm said: "Come for a walk, Doctor, before you go back. Your face is not something of cheer—the stubble of the reaped fields, and the drapery of the clouds in the sky will wipe off the smudge."

Walking, I think we each tried to wean our minds from the disagreeable. Malcolm talked vociferously of the sky aspect.

"Man! but the clouds are glorious to-day," he said. "Yon tangled mass in the west is like the Rocky Mountain Range, huge-cleft valleys and snow-topped peaks. All the majesty of man's construction is like a jack-in-the-box compared with that magnificence."

"It's a very black heavy cloud," I answered; "It hovers over the burnt-gold carpet of these fields like the mystery that hangs over our spirits."

"There you go again, Doctor. Born an optimist—I'll wager you had red hair when you were young—the hopeful castle builder, now you're in apostasy, pessimistic to the edge of despair. Man alive! look at the glorious silver fringe to that mass of cloud."

"But I see no silver lining to the lone woman's cloud," I objected.

"You don't? and what did you tell me to-day—not an hour ago?"

Rebuked, I plodded on a little in silence.

"It's no use, Malcolm," I cried bitterly, "I can't shake

off a horribly repugnant feeling that Neil never left the village—alive," I added.

"Well, he couldn't leave it in the daylight any other way but alive, without somebody knowing it."

"His body could have been carried out in the dark."

"Aye, it could, but it wasn't."

"How do you know that, Malcolm?"

"I can prove it to you, and perhaps that will add to your peace of mind, though it never had much influence with me, for I always felt convinced that he just walked quietly away, taking the country road for it, perhaps to some small railway station, with the animal cunning of some half-daft creature."

"But the proof, Malcolm," I cried impatiently.

"I'll give it to you. There was a letter found in the post box at the opening hour, eight o'clock, by MacKay; it was addressed, in Munro's peculiar well-known hand, to the proprietor of the 'Plowshare,' and was an order revoking the ban that Minister had put upon the selling of liquor to Robert Craig. For my own information I had a talk with Postie MacKay about this letter. He's a sharp-eyed man, is Donald, and the fact of Minister writing to the tavern keeper caught his inquisitive fancy. Well, MacKay, when I quizzed him, remembered that Neil's letter lay on top of all the others —two of my own, in fact, that I'd slipped into the opening about six o'clock. I was abroad early, taking a look at the sunrise. And there were others, workers, that post letters early in the morning; so you see Doctor, Minister must have slipped that in the box sometime about seven o'clock, perhaps later."

"Did you have suspicions, too, Malcolm?"

"I was just looking for a clew. I just locked all fancies

and imaginings in a drawer by themselves as being worse than useless."

"But Robert might have put that letter in the box," I persisted; "he may have forced Munro to give it to him."

"A very weak argument, Cameron," Malcolm retorted; "Munro was not a man to be forced by anybody—he just did this thing voluntarily. And Robert was intoxicated I'm thinking—that's what caused the row—so Minister wouldn't trust the letter to him; and, even if he had, the boy, made boastful with strong drink, irresponsible, would have taken it to the tavern keeper, flourishing it as a sign of victory. He'd have been a great man in his own estimation."

"But why should Munro give such a letter just when Robert appeared to need being on the black list most, when he had broken out?"

"That was the very cause," Malcolm affirmed complacently. "That the devil of desire that was in the boy had not been lain low, that it now made him a thief, caused Minister to give up in despair. The ban was so useless anyway. The law seems powerless to put down the drink. Do you know how they evade that restriction of the black list?"

"I thought it was impossible—there's a heavy fine," I said.

Bain looked at me pityingly. "You're a man of books, Doctor, having great faith in the majesty of the law. I'll tell you. A man on the black list, with his liquor forbidden, will be invited up to the bar by a man more foolish than himself. Aye, we might name the foolish one Cain. Cain asks Abel to take a drink, calling for whisky himself. The bartender passes Abel—who is under the ban—a cigar. That closes the deal so far as the hotel is concerned; it has observed

the letter of the law. Then Cain slits Abel's throat—he makes a trade with him, trades his glass of whisky to Abel for the cigar. Man alive! but it's a glorious thing, this human intellect; it's clever. I suppose that when Robert had the quarrel with Munro that night he cast this up to him—sneered at his puny efforts for reformation. Perhaps it was the last straw that broke the camel's back of Neil's fruitless endeavor. What the workings of his mind were, I can't say; melancholia takes strange forms. He wouldn't be the first—nor the thousandth who has wandered off pursuing strange phantoms, forgetting name, the ties of home, perhaps even God."

Bain's voice lowered huskily as he mentioned the last stage of forgetfulness.

I returned to the Hedge, my mind brighter because of Malcolm's logical reasoning. Perhaps, after all, it was something in connection with this drinking business that Robert wished to conceal. It must be; the other was too horrible.

And then, at this summing up, the Devil pinched my elbow and whispered, "why has that sharp-pointed knife disappeared—why were the coat, and the cap, and the gloves burned?"

"Why? My God!" I cried in misery, "everything is 'why.'" Nothing but to wait; and to wait better perhaps than to know. If everything would but remain steeped in unsolvable mystery, time would draw the thick veil of eternal silence about it, and leave Jean bravely stepping the lone furrow, till her babe came—a new life rising out of the dead.

CHAPTER XIII

FOR a week we drifted on almost placid waters; deep and murky—unruffled by storms or dangerous currents, the heavy monotony of biding on sorrow and mystery relieved by trifles of brightness emanating almost entirely from the children.

There were distressing reports about Robert Craig; and often at midnight I could hear his unsteady step passing the Hedge, as he made his way to the old Craig home where he still lived.

One afternoon I saw Robert coming on the sidewalk and from his glances toward the house I conjectured his intention was to come in. From his appearance I judged that he was about three parts gone in the circuit of his daily orbit; his physical exterior was an unfailing index of his mental condition. Generally about ten o'clock he was in perihelion, neat and vivacious; from that on there would be a subtle deterioration in apparel and gentility of intellect. Each additional drink would set awry his hat, or his tie, or disconnect a button—brush his eye with the glaze of brightness until, later, layer upon layer, the glaze would become opaque; and at this stage his vocabulary would become disjointed. Now I

observed his most absolute sign of spirit excitement—a hand twitching nervously at one side of his thin blond mustache.

I didn't want him coming in where Jean might see him in that state, so I passed hurriedly through the gate, ostensibly on my way to the stores.

"Hello, Doc," Robert cried when we met, "skipping the muse? How's the quill—mightier'n the sword to-day?"

"Jean is not very well—she's lying down with a bad headache, and I was just going up to the druggist." I said this to forestall what I anticipated was a visit to Jean; but he answered, "I wasn't coming to see Sister—I wanted to speak to you; strictly confidential, you know."

Robert pulled at his thin mustache and eyed me.

"You haven't heard anything, have you, Robert?" I asked, startled.

"That's just what I have; that's what I want to see you 'bout."

Jean was really in her room lying down, and lest passers might hear what he had to say, I led the way back to my lawn.

"Ah! that'sh what I like— This'sh better," the boy said as he took a chair; "I hate standing up to talk bus'ness—no good."

I scrutinized him closer now. Judging from his careless speech he was more drunk than I had thought.

"What is it, Robert?" I asked; "not bad news, I hope."

"Yes; bad news"—the boy viciously hesitated long enough for me to show my anxiety, then he added, "Munro's alive, right enough."

"And you call that bad news, you confounded rascal."

"I'll excuse you, Doctor—you don't know what you're talking about."

I ignored this. "How do you know?" I asked, "what have you heard—who told you—where is Neil?" I poured the questions one after another.

"A man 'at used to know Neil saw him in Montreal."

"Where is the man—here?"

"No; he's in York—and that's what I want to talk about—I am going in to see him."

"My God, boy, you'll save your sister's life perhaps, if you can find Neil."

Robert looked at me curiously. There was sullen dissent in his eyes; the profligate lips hardened in a sneer.

"You mean well, Doctor, but you don't know what you're talking about," he answered through the lips that bittered the words with their sneer. Then he added, "I want to get twenty dollars from you; I'm short."

A sudden suspicion flashed across my mind that Robert, now under the influence of his master, had fabricated this story to obtain money for a drinking bout in York. I remembered the stolen wine, and Malcolm, who was trustee for Robert and Jean, had confided in me the trouble he had in keeping the boy from spending not only his own but Jean's income. And the boy's causticity in his reference to this trace of Munro was also suspicious. Besides, he was in no state to start away half intoxicated.

"I won't give you the money to-night, Robert," I said flatly; "you've been drinking too much—wait till to-morrow."

He flared up indignantly, declaring he was as sober as a judge; but I was saved a scene by Malcolm's opportune ar-

rival. He nodded to Craig, saying: "Good day to you, Robert. It's warm—we'll have rain."

To me, knowing the subtle manifestations of Bain's moods, this greeting of friendship, tinged by reserve, the allusion to the neutral subject of the weather indicated plainly that Malcolm's shrewd eye had noted the boy's condition. Indeed Malcolm always preserved an attitude of reserved politeness toward Craig, and, in consequence, the latter stood considerably in awe of him. It was really a trying renunciation upon Bain's part, adopted as a painless form of mastery; for, because of his chivalric love for Jean, Malcolm entertained toward the boy the same tender regard he might have had for a younger brother.

"I came in for my umbrella, Cameron," Bain explained, turning to me—"I left it yesterday; we'll catch it heavy tonight. I thought the mountain might split yon black cloud, but the wind is from the east, and the east wind always has its own way. I've got to come out to a meeting in the church this evening—it won't be bad if some of the determined ones get a soaking for their hurry, I'm thinking."

"What's up?" I asked.

"It's all up. They've convened a meeting to have the Presbytery declare the pulpit vacant, and then extend a call to Minister Grey."

"They seem to take it for granted Munro is dead," I exclaimed bitterly.

"Aye, they do."

Robert had been sitting in sullen anger, Malcolm's arrival having curbed further expressions of wrath at my declaration. Now his anger shifted from me to the church people, his temper got the upper hand; he rose to his feet in a

rage. "Damn them for a lot of fools!" he cried. "I'll give them a surprise. You're all fools looking in the only paths you've ever trod for Munro's trail. I'm drunk, am I?"—now he had veered back to me—"but I'll tell you this, drunk, loaded to the neck, I'm the only one in the whole lot that knows anything about this, or about that hypocrite—*Min-is-ter Munro*!" The boy broke the word minister into three fragments with a sneering drawl of contempt.

I stared in horror. It was like the fitful play of an insane mind; but Malcolm just drew a deep breath, and said calmly, "Robert, if you know anything, tell it like a man."

"Tell it like a dog, you mean. Never, Bain. I'll give the Pharisees a jar."

The boy went out through the gate, clanging it angrily behind him. And Malcolm, turning to me with a troubled face, asked: "Have you any idea, Cameron, what Robert means? I heard his voice, angry-like, just as I happened in. One minute I think he's just going queer with whisky, and again I'm of the opinion that there's something behind his antics. Was he saying anything about Minister?"

"Yes—that he was alive—had been seen."

"Thank God!"

It was an honest exclamation.

"But I'm in grave doubt, Bain, about any dependence to be placed upon Robert's story."

I saw the glad look pass gradually from Bain's face as I related my interview with Craig.

"I'm afraid you're right, Doctor; and you acted wisely in not giving him the money. I'll see Robert myself to-morrow, early, when he's quite himself. I'll just force the truth from him; there may be something in it, and if I think there

is, I'll just go to York with him—that's the only way. He's as weak as water, poor boy! I'd go to-night if it weren't for this meeting. I was meaning to have a talk with you, while I was here, about these same money matters. I was putting it off till the last minute, till like the foreclosing of the mortgage. To-night Munro will practically cease to be the incumbent and his salary will be stopped—it would have been stopped before now, if I hadn't made a strong stand. Aye, my brother Scots don't leave their business instincts at the door of the kirk like a Mussulman puts off his shoes at the mosque. And I'm going to confide in you, if you don't mind, Cameron, a business that I hoped to keep all to myself; but it's not safe, it's not to the best interests of—of—Mrs. Munro.

"In the first place—going away back—as you know, MacKay and I were executors for Simon Craig. Robert was left the home; the income from the estate, which was chiefly some timber lands and a saw mill in Tecumseh, was to be divided between Jean and Robert. I think I managed fairly well, for there was little to do but just pay out the income. But for the past year or two there's been little to divide, and, paradoxically, that has made it harder."

"I see." I understood that Malcolm was thinking solely of the loss to Robert and Jean.

"I'm glad you do," he said dryly, "for what I stated hardly sounded like good sense. Minister Munro had his salary, but he might as well have been without it; he didn't seem to comprehend that any of it was needed for himself or the wife; in fact, he gave away all he had—more, too, for there are a few debts. I thought that the timber property would pick up, so I just loaned the estate a trifle without

saying anything to MacKay about it—I was looking after the books myself, mind you. Robert was needing money—more than he got, I'm pleased to say—and the sister too; so I just paid them what they should have got if things hadn't been bad in the timber line. I didn't make any note of this matter in the books, or anywhere, for it would only have fuddled MacKay, and he's a busy man. I wouldn't have done it if I had needed the money myself—but I didn't—I had enough," Bain added apologetically when I involuntarily put my hand affectionately on his knee.

"Don't flatter yourself, Cameron," he continued, "that you'd have been let know this—or any other man for the matter of that, only that I'm now forced to tell you because I'm needing your services. In short, with Munro's stipend cut off—and the mill shut down this summer because there was no snow last winter to get out logs—there'll be little or nothing for either of the poor children. Also I had a bit look over the timber lands, and it's pretty well stripped, so there'll not be much for the future."

"I understand."

"I think you do now—I'm trying to be explicit, though tiresome perhaps. Now I want to just keep up a bit income for Mrs. Munro and Robert; they were left in my charge, and the Lord was good enough to supply me with funds not of my own making. I could have managed this much without troubling anybody about it, for MacKay is not much for meddling if he thinks things are all right, but you see, Doctor, something might happen me."

"God forbid, Malcolm!" I ejaculated.

"Aye, I hope it won't, for a time, but it may. There's a very strong line in the Good Book bearing on that subject

illustrating the uncertainty of life: 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee'—so, Doctor, I'm going to arrange for up to the time that shall be spoken in my case, and for after, if needed. And I'm going to ask you to just see that it's carried out. Will you do that, man? I've thought hours over it—I can't do it alone, and I can trust you, Cameron; now, will you do it, man?"

"God! Bain, you're a noble character—I'll do everything in my power."

"There's no great praise coming to me, Cameron; I can't eat the money, I've no one to give it to, that is, that's needing it sorely. And these two were left in my charge; they are the only children I ever came by or ever will. And if anything is ever said that would hurt Jean, you could nail the lie, Doctor, for you know how it is now.

"Man! but I've talked a lot," Bain added, looking at his watch.

"Not a bit of it," I objected. "Silence may be golden, but speech clears the air."

"It's the other way about sometimes," Bain argued. "There'll be the meeting to-night."

"I'll go, Malcolm," I declared.

"Thank you, Doctor. See the cleverness of that storm; it'll come down the Ninth Concession Road through the dip in the mountain. It'll just save its energy for a full bang at the village. Good afternoon to you."

It was solely Bain's unexpressed wish that gave me an intention to attend the church meeting. Functionally I might go as an interested member in proxy for the Memsahib, who was quite a church worker. This would be sufficient to still the tongues of captious ones ready to impute idle curiosity, or

a prying lieutenantship in Jean's interests. But now, drawn into it casually though I had been, I thought of the meeting with eager anticipation. It would be a chance for psychological study. The villagers had moved upon a somewhat distant horizon. I had seen them as an artist views a landscape through half-closed eyes, the shading lids blurring to softness hard lines of distinction, blocking the whole into masses of light and shade.

Trooping stanchly to church Sabbath mornings, I had taken their submissive adherence to the Calvinistic creed as an admirable guarantee of observance of the highest law governing humanity. Indeed Sunday the village was Utopian from a theological point of view. The slightest attempt at desecration of the holy day had been put down ruthlessly; new-fangled innovations of the Devil's instigation nipped in the bud. Perhaps the most serious attempt to offset the Lord's wise fourth commandment had been the insidious introduction of a Sunday newspaper full of worldly doings. It wasn't really a Sunday paper, for it was published Saturday night in the city of York.

The son of a poor widow, wishing to help his mother in her struggle for existence, no doubt listening to the tempting voice of the Evil One, hit upon a plan of endeavor, which, if he had been allowed to pursue his wicked course, would, soon or late, have brought about moral disaster. He entered into a compact with the godless proprietors of the York papers to send him by the Sunday morning train running through Iona a bundle of these "Devil's pamphlets."

It was Deacon Hoskins of a lesser church who had so rightly named the pernicious journal; and it was Deacon Hoskins who overthrew the Evil One and his campaign of

destruction by stopping the sale of the paper, using the law as his weapon.

Could we have lived thus seven days of the week I fancy it would have taken little strain to remain entirely holy, but the other six of sharp-edged strife in the matter of barter, threw the theological system sadly out of joint. Several deals of my own had confused my mind sadly as to the real moral status of the good people.

There was the unreconcilable cord of firewood that had been delivered to me at least a quarter short in measurement; there was the load of potatoes for which I had paid a liberal price upon the assurance of the tubers being superlatively good, that in the pot turned a chrome-yellow and nauseating to the palate through having been frozen before delivery. In fact I had a suspicion that, trading upon my inexperience, the worthy farmer had sought me out as an easy victim. And rankling in my mind as a curious misvaluation of trust were the several barrels of apples I had brought from another yeoman as prime A 1 shipping fruit, charged for in accordance with this quality; but "when the pie was opened they all began to sing," a veritable song of derision, for the apples were "seconds," worth less than half the sum I had paid for them.

My trust in humanity carried a chipped edge all around its rather wide margin through the nicks that had been left in it by men who considered me in a very bad way indeed, spiritually; it resembled a wall which abutted my lawn. It was the Agnostic's critical eye and tongue that discovered to me how thoroughly I had been done in this piece of masonry.

"Making bricks without straw was nothing to the feat those masons accomplished," he said one day, prodding at the wall with his cane.

"Be careful, Major," I exclaimed; "you are poking a hole in it."

He laughed quizzically and continued not only his discourse, but the disruption of the abutment. "Here's a cement wall without any cement."

"You're mistaken, Major," I asserted; "I paid for four bags of cement."

"I don't doubt that in the least, and some other man paid for them again when they were really put into his work. This is nothing but a square mound of sand and gravel and a little lime, glazed over with a cement shell the thickness of blotting paper; a pail of cement for the whole job."

The Major was right. The disreputable wall was something to stand there as an insistent rebuke to my faith in the honest toiler of the simple life.

The only incident in this warfare of spiritual excellence against mundane depravity that I failed utterly in tabulating correctly was an incident that actually had nothing to do with me whatever, yet, like a true villager, I bothered the more over it.

Perhaps Hugh Chisholm had found Presbyterianism too frivolous and unexacting; at any rate he was a deacon in the Church of the Plymouth Brethren. Coincident with this he kept a store.

And one day his fellow-Plymouthians stared aghast at an advertisement of Deacon Chisholm's in the Iona paper which read:

"Nobby hats and smart shoes for sale."

This was a little too much for the Plymouth Brothers, and they took serious counsel with Deacon Hugh, asking him to

eliminate that dangerous word "Nobby." It was almost as wicked as the posters of women in short skirts which an unwise traveling show had attempted to display upon the village fences.

The Deacon bowed his neck meekly to their reprimand, and next week his advertisement was changed to:

"Hats for the upright and shoes for tender-feet."

I noted this change with varied interest. I knew the Deacon as a man most conscientiously interested in his own affairs and the affairs of others, but up to this reading I had never felt that he was unnecessarily hilarious. His whole manner rather inclined one to not expect too much levity; but that hyphen was either due to weak punctuation or an extremely subtle humor, to say nothing of the reference to persons qualified to buy his hats.

I took the liberty of a cheerful allusion to the pleasure I had derived from his advertisement, but he reproved my jocose comment solemnly, saying that the Brothers were quite right in calling his attention to the matter, that owing to a press of business he had not given the first advertisement sufficient thought, forgetting how prone to frivolity the young were. He had not realized how dangerous such an example from a leader in the Church really was.

I had been started on this rehearsal pilgrimage of moral obliquity and Sabbath rectitude by an anticipatory belief that I should see, that evening, at the church meeting these two antagonistic elements at each other's throats, as it were. I wandered about the lawn, caressing the Memsahib's ox-blood dahlias, sniffing at the fragrant petunias, tantalizing my finer sensitiveness with the subtle perfumed breath that came fitfully from the pale lips of My Lady Nicotine, who, now rous-

ing from her odorless sleep of the day, kissed the evening shades with langorous sweetness.

My first impression at the church meeting that evening was one of astonished surprise at the metamorphosis of character in John MacRae. Ordinarily he was a heavy-faced Scot, economical of everything, including words — though once upon a time I had known him to draw on his bank of Golden Silence for the saving of a little silver. He had brought me a load of very musty hay, veneered on top by a thin layer of the choice sweet article, and his taciturnity, up to a certain point when I sought to discuss this matter with him, encompassed him like an impenetrable armor; then at last he came out of his shell to say:

"Aye, aye! Man alive! but it's too bad. They Englishers we ha'e to hire on the farms now are just too careless for onything. I'll just see about it. I'll gi'e yon Cockney that loaded the hay a lecture aboot his carelessness—man alive! it's fair dishonest to be as reckless as that. I'll ha'e a bit talk wi' him, an' see just what he's got to say for himsel'. Forbye he doesna come an' apologize to you, Doctor, I'll just see to it mysel', an' we'll arrange it to suit all parties. I'll no' stand for such doings."

That was the last I ever heard of the matter; MacRae had my money in his ocket, I had the bad hay, and, for all I knew, the Cockney hireling was a mythological person. No doubt it had grieved the Scot to squander so much breath, but it was in a good cause, it saved him parting with some of the money he had filched from me.

Now at the meeting Elder MacRae was one of the first to express his views, and nobody but a Scot could have so interminably intermingled religion and uncharitableness. It

really appeared as if, in condemning Munro's pastorate, in asking the congregation to extend a call to Minister Grey, MacRae was suffering the pangs of martyrdom; somehow, by a far-reaching sweep, he likened himself to Daniel in the lion's den, even, I believe, that he was like One driving the pigeon dealers from the Temple.

Bain was sitting beside me at the time MacRae was strenuously severing the tie of sympathy that connected the congregation with their absent minister; he leaned over and whispered: "Yon's a fine sample of a wife-badgered husband. Jennie MacRae has molded the bullets John is firing into poor Neil's back. A vindictive woman is as productive of condemning reasons as the Jews that were at Pontius Pilate to crucify the Saviour."

There were friends of Munro in the meeting—several, but they were sorely hampered by the ethical weakness of their cause. Munro had voluntarily gone away, practically deserted his post; and so mysteriously that it was impossible to combat almost any derogatory reason that might be advanced. Besides, the Church was without a head, which was of course a very bad affair. These points were brought out very clearly by what Malcolm called the "Grey party"—the eye-for-an-eye and tooth-for-a-tooth party.

Minister's defenders could plead only for sympathy and patience—in fact, judicially their case was lamentably weak.

It was Anderson, an elder, one of those who had been stung by Munro's crusade against the sin of intemperance, who alluded to the defection of certain members from the church, even while Minister Munro was with them. He all but said that it would be better if Munro did not come back.

I think it was this that galvanized Malcolm Bain into his electrically thrilling plea for Minister Munro.

MacKay, an uncertain quantity at all times, apt to twist a line of argument into a toboggan chute, carrying him with swift recklessness to distances far beyond his intended goal, somehow became vindictively critical of Minister Munro's last appearance in the pulpit, the somewhat sensational sermon he had preached the day before his disappearance.

"It was very unorthodox," MacKay began moderately enough; "it was confusing but no' deep. Declamation is vera fine—in its place, mind you," he qualified—"in its place." He repeated this sapient rider slowly while he groped for an explicit place for declamation. "On the hustings it's vera effective; but politics is no' religion. Aye, Minister was distinctly sensational, which is all vera well for some denominations, but'll no' do in the Kirk at all, at all."

"Aye, aye," affirmed MacRae, nodding his shaggy head as ponderously as a Durham bull.

"There was no solemnity about his discourse at all," continued MacKay; "it fidgeted me; and a body is no' in a proper prayerful mood when they're fidgeted. A man might as well expect to hook a cunnin' trout while he was being jiggled off his pins wi' mosquitoes."

"True enough, true enough!" applauded Anderson; "the congregation was very restless during the sermon. Mrs. MacGillicuddy—I remember quite well—dropped her glasses on the floor. My! they clattered; an' I'll guarantee that she sat in yon side pew for thirty years without blinkin' an eye. She is a model of decorum during service, is the old body."

"And old Archie Campbell never slept a wink," affirmed MacRae; "he just sat there glowering wi' his glassy eyes,

staring in horror at the theories—they were just that, theories, nothin' more—propounded by Minister."

Bain leaned over to me and whispered: "It was vastly improper for Munro to rouse Archie Campbell like that. He must have been talking about the long-tailed sheep of David's time, for Archie just comes to church for a rest I think, a bit of sleep; and he's a hard man to make pay for his bed too."

"Aye," continued MacKay, scratching his head for the fugitive rest of his argument that these observations had caused to elude him. "Aye, poor Munro, indeed it was! He was fair distract. He was a gude man—just in himself, I'm meaning, though if he'd exerted less, trusted more in the Book, and the power o' the Lord speecified there, he'd a come by grander results. He was aye feverish in expression. It's a large congregation here, and deefficult to keep in hand forbye, and I'm thinkin' Minister took too much on himsel'."

Bain pressed his toe gently against my leg to draw my attention to the extraordinary winding in and out of the Scot's argument.

But MacKay, somehow attracted by a sympathetic remembrance of Munro's zeal, proceeded to neutralize his earlier efforts in behalf of a call. He continued: "Perhaps if Minister is just biding quietly some place for a bit rest, he'll come back to us more in harmony wi' the majesty o' the Presbyterian form o' discoorse. If ony one has word o' him, I'd be for indulgin' in the patience that we're enjoined to hold. But if he's dead, it stands to reason that we're wi'out a pastor. Perhaps it would be as well for us to prove this point first. I'm no' against Minister Munro, but I'm no' for him if he's dead—I mean, I'm no' for keeping the pulpit open indefinitely."

When MacKay sat down everybody realized that though he had talked considerably very little progress had been made; whatever his intentions were, he had spoiled the broth by too many ingredients.

But Anderson, clinging tenaciously to one word MacKay had uttered, "distract," used it as a shibboleth to disqualify Minister Munro.

"I'm not for criticising harshly any minister of God," he began, "but as Elder MacKay has said, Minister Munro was not only distract, but unorthodox in his discourse the last Sabbath he occupied the pulpit. I remember at the time, as I stood for a minute in the vestibule I said to—well to some one—'Minister is not himself, yon man has trouble.' But says he back, 'I'm thinkin' the shoe is on the other foot to-day.'

"'How so?' asks I.

"'Well,' says he, 'if you or me got as worked up as yon, they'd say we had a drop too much.'"

"The sneak means that Munro had been drinking," whispered Malcolm. "My God; was there ever such a Pharisee from the beginning of things!"

"Mind you, friends," added Anderson, "I'm no' entering an accusation against the absent pastor, I'm just makin' a general observation bearin' on the matter of holdin' the pastorate open. The idle rumors as to his going away are not in our province here to discuss; we must just bear in mind, however, that it was immediately after the sermon that he removed himself from our midst. The sermon was erratic, and Minister Munro was suffering a good deal from mental disturbance. Others saw this, it caused deflections from the congregation. The people from the fourth Line're all attending the Kirk at Dunnville now. There's a vast difference

between spiritual guidance and secular interference, and Minister Munro did not discriminate. I've known him to tramp out to a barn raising a good four miles to lecture the men about the evils of a bit drink. Men don't want the yoke roughed up to scald their necks. Good intention is often knocked out by overexertion. I've had men workin' myself, that had grand plans in the morning of the wonderful things they were going to accomplish that day, and by noon they were bushed and laid up for repairs. You see I'm givin' Minister Munro credit for a grand desire for betterment, but I'm thinkin' in the interest o' the Church we ought to give a call to some one."

"I'm not very clear from his speech what he's meaning," said Malcolm. "Of course he's for Grey, but he's wordy without saying much. I think I'd better say a word; but it is kicking against the pricks, they're firm-set already."

With a little flutter of trepidation I watched Malcolm uncoil his huge figure, ungainly beyond any suspicion of oratorical pose. Sitting quietly on the lawn with one or two, he could hark back to first principles in a few simple words, no matter how deeply involved the discussion might have become. Elemental principles were ever present in his mind, therefore whatever he said was usually very much to the point. But how successful would he be here in this discussion, bearing in mind that the stubborn facts, the patent necessities, were with his opponents?

"I'm not rising to speak in defense of Minister Munro," he began, "for that would be wasting your time, as it's not needed. There's no charge against him except that he labored too zealously, and that didn't please some; but that's hardly a fault in the Presbyterian Church. There was need

for him, or some other right-thinking man of authority, to go to the barn raising Elder Anderson has spoken of, for the week before a man lost his life because of the liquor—his pike-pole slipped because he was too drunk to hold it in a post, and the bent came down, killing him, and by nothing less than a miracle were others saved when the bent crashed to earth. It has been spoken as a fault on the Minister's part that there were some defections—some of the members went elsewhere for more agreeable religion. But I'm thinking that you could hardly expect a human to hold every member of a congregation, when Christ Himself couldn't hold His disciples. We know, for it is written in God's word, that when Jesus accused them of lack of faith they fell away at once—many disciples left him. But that did not change the Christian religion, nor weaken it, nor destroy His usefulness as a teacher of God's will; and I'm thinking that truthful denunciation of wickedness, of evident evil, is as useful as the pruning hook. If it lops off branches with a canker at their hearts, the tree itself grows stronger and more beautiful, and bears better fruit than if the husbandman had held back in fear and hesitancy and allowed the disease to spread, shutting his eyes to its encroachment.

"Anyway that was our great teacher, Christ's, method, and it was the way of the Prophets; it's the lesson in God's word. You may gild sin till it passes for virtue, but if a strong, right-thinking man unmasks it there it is, hideous and revolting, and something to be shunned.

"Christ stated Himself that He had come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance, and that was the animating spirit of our minister's life. And when he spoke of their sin that they might know the danger, and they rebelled, so

much the worse for the sinners; it couldn't hurt the Church or the cause, or anything but themselves. But it did hurt Minister. I've seen him with tears in his eyes, because he feared that he was weak, and not strong enough to call them to repentance.

"And I'm just saying this—I think it's true—that he was worn down with his labors, and went away for a little rest, and that with patience we'll find him yet. If we declare his pastorate abolished, it will be like tolling a bell to his memory. Minister's friends here are not asking this as a right, but just as a touch of God's love and charity. If we're Christians in our hearts, we'll not become evil through being satisfied with supply ministers for a little yet."

I think Bain had another point or two annotated on the margin of his memory; if he had, they had become blurred, for he hesitated, looked about into the unsympathetic faces of the elders in a big pleading manner, and sat down.

What a fine man Bain is altogether, I thought; but still I felt, as I suppose he did himself, that he was dealing with precise, not-to-be-disturbed, Scotch minds.

After a little more discussion it was carried by a majority of votes that the Presbytery should be asked to appoint the Moderator to preach the pulpit vacant the first Sabbath.

"What have they done at the meeting?" the Memsahib asked when I returned to the Hedge.

"Well, they've overmastered poor old Bain," I answered; and when I told her the full result, the Memsahib said: "We'll just keep it from Jean as long as we can. She'll come to hear it, but one never knows what may happen—we'll just put off the evil day as long as we can, perhaps Providence will intervene."

CHAPTER XIV

AN hour later the Memsahib called to me from my study window where she stood, a half-drawn curtain in her hand, holding her cheek against the soft autumn night air that stirred the pale white bells of the nicotine resting its slender form against the veranda.

"Come and look at the Madonna, John," she said; "there is a most extraordinary light on the window."

"It's a strange effect," I answered, putting a hand on her shoulder; "the figures have the appearance of being in a fiery furnace."

"They're late putting out the lights," she added. "Ah! there they go," as the glass window became merged in the gray wall of gloom that was the stone church. I had half turned away when the Memsahib grasped my arm, crying: "It is lighted up again! It is uncanny—creepy!"

"It is," I confirmed.

It was a picture that might have been conjured by some high priest of theosophical mysticism. Now we could see the adorable face of the Madonna, growing discernible, pale and wan, and then reddening to luridness as the Babe Saviour materialized in her lap, and out of the darkness that sur-

rounded her, bearded shepherd faces came one by one in a flickering light and then were gone as though the owners stole a look and fled.

"Somebody is moving about with a candle or lantern," I said; "the church is in darkness."

"It is like an omen of trouble—of disaster," the Memsahib answered; shiveringly she drew a wrap about her shoulders.

"Oh, look at it now!" I cried; the whole window blazed red and angry, and weird shadows flickered back and forth within.

Suddenly there was a crash, a tinkle, the Babe Christ had fallen from the Madonna's lap, and where He had lain, a licking tongue of flame darted forth and lapped at the darkness.

The Memsahib gave a scream of affright. I stifled in my throat the cry of fire, and by the arm drew her from the window. Her face was white. "Is the church on fire?" she gasped.

"For God's sake keep cool, girl; grip yourself."

I clung to her for a little, and speaking with hushed rapidity went on: "Jean! get her to her room at once. And the children, too! yes—stay with them."

"I was thinking of Jean," she said.

"Quick! there they go!"

Hurrying feet beat at the board sidewalk till it echoed like an alarm drum, and one, strong lunged, sent a rolling cry of "Fi-re!" as he ran.

"Quick, Allis!" I urged.

Higher up the street the runner's cry was echoed, "Fi-re! —fi-re! fi-i-i-r-e!"

What dread import it carried how it startled and jumped the nerves!

Beside the Memsahib I raced upstairs and spoke to the children, as, half roused from slumber, they blinked sleepily, their faces wrinkled with frightened wonder.

"There's a little fire in the church," I said; "don't be afraid when you hear the reels."

The boy came running from his room, and almost in shame I saw in his face eager joyous excitement. Reels—a fire! It was a kind of game!

Now the town bell clanged angrily, warningly, and soon there was the reverberating thunder of the high-wheeled hose-reel, hyphened by the short imperious clang of its gong.

Beyond the Hedge the street was a pandemonium. Just in front of Grandma Murdock's little lawn black spirits of the night were clawing at an iron hydrant, and a long gray serpent, held by their strong arms, writhed and twisted in the dust of the road, and bit open-mouthed at the iron fountain. From my gateway I watched the figures writhe and twist and struggle. It was a shadowed group like the Laocoön. With hoarse voices they called to each other; they tugged at the unyielding iron.

With calm fascination I watched this hurried fight against time; seconds were ages. Now the fierce red tongues across the way were lapping and licking at the night with hissing exultation through many rents in the glass window, and behind the holding stones that were like the walls of a lime kiln, there was a crackle of musketry, and against the hydrant metal the copper mouthpiece of the canvas hose clicked and clattered unavailingly. Would it never connect!

"Push her up—push her up—reef on her!" a voice bellowed, and the order smothered away in an oath.

"Give her to me! Steady, lads!"

Ah, loved voice of soothing confidence, of gripping power! And the broad shoulders dipping to the work, silhouetted bearlike against the store window across—yes, it was Bain.

"All right—run her out!" And the man, hurrying from the hydrant, laid the canvas serpent up the side street. Against the gray walls is a ladder. "Up, up!"—it is Malcolm's voice—"smash the window with an ax!"

The glass is shivered—it falls a tinkling shower; and against the broad stone ledge of the rudely opened window two men lean, gripping the handles of a copper nozzle.

Then they fight. The little ants of men, the Lilliputians, with the javelin of water, thrusting at the demon of fire that snarls and hisses through all the front half of the church.

The fire is coming from below, from the basement; the floor is all ablaze; the pews are tinder, are rows of fagots to feed the hungry maw.

Anxiously I scan the somber clouds of smoke that rise like huge-winged vultures upward and fly to the west.

"Thank God!" I mutter, "the wind is from off our quarter." For it's a shingle roof that tops Lilac Hedge, and I have no longing for a shower of burning embers on its cedar, and a flood from the hose. I have the garden hose connected and am throwing a dampening spray of water on our front.

I bless the sheltering maples; even as they beat back the scorching sun in summer days, so now they barrier from us

this fierce flame, their guarding leaves, shriveled up, dying in the combat, and floating away on gossamer spirit wings, or falling blackened and charred to earth.

The oaken doors of the church, barrier between the pushing draught of air and the sucking flames, eaten into, give way. They collapse like a burnt-out Catherine wheel. The draught makes hoarse music as it roars through the aperture. Driven before this fanning wind a hot blast belches forth to scorch the men's faces who hold the hose. Insatiably drinking as though it lapped oil, fire creeps along the floor with the uncheckable force of an incoming tide.

Opposite, another window is smashed, and the copper barrel of a second nozzle, throwing a mighty stream, is thrust through.

Now the battle holds even; the balance tips slowly this way and then that way, and victory hangs poised between the fire and its fighters.

Suddenly a cry of fright goes up from one of the windows.

"My God, boys, look at that!" cries Sweeny, clinging, with scorched face, to the copper nozzle, as a man reels drunkenly into the blaze of light from the shadow of the great organ. He has come up a little stairway that leads from basement to apse, the choir passage.

The yellow, sulphurous light shows his face pale, bluish, like a death mask; his eyes are starting from his head with fright. He gives a cry like a caged animal, and recoiling from the scorching heat, falls against the organ. He wheels, and rushes to the stairway up which he has come. Below, the basement is a furnace, an incinerating pit of cremation. He starts back with a cry of despair.

"Help! My God!" he cries, and shuts the blare of light from his eyes with an arm. He is dazed.

Bain, on the ladder behind the two hosemen, bracing them with his shoulders to the window ledge, hears the fireman's cry of fright and calls: "What is it, Dick?"

"Craig is in the church! and, God in heaven, he'll be burned alive!"

"Hold steady, lads!" Bain calls; "brace against the wall, I'm coming."

Between their legs he creeps; his knees are on the stone ledge; one look, to balance in the scales the chances, then he says: "Play the stream on the floor; I'm going after the poor lad."

From window ledge to floor Bain dropped with panther-like lightness; down an aisle and up to the apse; then his big hand lifted the figure that huddled against the organ.

"Up, man, up! Stand on your legs! You're saved! You're saved!—do you hear?"

His words carried no meaning to the senses numbed by fear; the alcohol-sapped nerves, unstrung, were broken cords.

"Come with me—you're saved!"

Then dragging Craig like an unwilling child, Bain pushed down the steps, and as the flames, ever creeping on their path of destruction, brushed hot against their forms, Craig shrank back and fought like a maniac.

"You fool!" Bain roared in anger, as he swung from the pulpit a red plush chair.

It was a fearful hazard; the floor hung by its half-burned sills, a treacherous sieve; the fire had eaten it like a moth-ridden cloth; and from below flames darted up through the wooden mesh of its network. From the window eager helpers

waited as Malcolm, now carrying Craig, crept cautiously toward them, sometimes hidden by the smoke.

There he was, just beneath, in one hand the chair. Half blinded he placed it as a ladder against the wall, and lifting Craig to his breast mounted upward. Sweeny's long arm stretched far down, and his fingers clutched at Craig's shoulder as he was lifted high by the strong hands of Malcolm. A second and they would be saved.

Suddenly a stream from the opposite window thrust downward like the swinging cut of a scimiter and struck with awful force the chair back on which rested Bain's feet.

He reeled outward. Half pulled from the window ledge, Sweeny's fingers relaxed their grasp, and Craig's body, lying across Malcolm's neck, carried him down like a stricken bull. The treacherous charred floor split like a drum head, and Craig shot through, his rescuer lying half stunned across a sill.

One look down, and Bain, swinging his body between the floor beams, dropped. A cloud of smoke swept over the opening, blotting it from the vision of the watchers.

"Holy Mother—he's a goner!" wailed Sweeny. "Hold her hard, Donald—play the water fair on the floor!" and grasping a rung of the ladder he dropped to the ground, crying: "Up, one of you b'ys, an' help at the hose! Help! some of you fellers—the back door—the back door! An ax—here with an ax!" His voice was an agonized yell.

As he ran around the church Sweeny called: "Bain's inside—in the basement. Smash the back door! Here, Mac," he called, as one came running with an ax, "hit her! The lock, you damn fool!—the lock!" as the pole of the ax rebounded from a heavy oak panel of the door.

A crashing blow and the cast metal sprayed them with iron hail.

Some force from within swung the door as it loosed from its holding bolt; a figure reeled forth, shoulders first, and plunged against their legs; beneath it, clutched in the mighty arms, was a rag-doll of humanity, limp, senseless.

"Malcolm! B'ys, b'ys, he's alive! Merciful powers! the other wan, too! Lift him, men, lift him!" bellowed Sweeny. "Are you hurted, Malcolm?" he continued solicitously, bending to thrust an arm under the brawny Scot's head, and peering into the blackened face.

Bain answered something; it was a groan, a struggling cry for mastery over his failing senses, a fight against unconsciousness; calling himself out of stupefying lethargy. Half consciously he rolled his body from off the man that was crushed beneath his weight.

"Where's Doc?—heigh, Doc Weston!" Sweeny called.

"All right, Dick," a voice answered; I'll look after them. Here, men, bear a hand—we must get them to some house quick," he added.

"My house," I said; "it's close by, and there's room."

Eager men darted forward, and Bain, struggling to his knees, said wearily: "Give me a—steadying hand—someone, I'm—queer—I'm queer—I can't see."

"Youse b'ys look after Bain," commanded Sweeny. "Doc'll tell you what's wanted." Then in futility he turned fiercely upon the firemen at the window. "Get her down, b'ys! Damn it, men, down wit' her—down wit' the hose!—in at the back door; yer t'rowin' water at the moon, up there!"

"I'll hurry on ahead," I said to Doctor Weston.

"How is the fire?" Memsahib asked as I came to the gate.

"They're beating it down," I answered aloud; and in an undertone added, "Bain is hurt, and Craig is worse. They're bringing them here. What room will you put Craig in? he'll have to get to bed—he's bad."

"We must break it to Jean," she answered.

"Yes; speak to her now—quick, before they come." A slow-moving procession of black figures was now crossing the street, coming to the Hedge.

The Memsahib passed to the veranda where Jean was sitting, and almost immediately the latter came to me, saying: "I must have Robert in my room; I can take care of him there."

I felt a trembling hand on my arm, there was a weak querulous pull at my sleeve, and little Teacher, on tiptoe, whispered in my ear, "Is he dead, Doctor Cameron—is it Robert? Poor, poor Jean!"

Before I could answer, men, carrying the injured boy in their arms, crowded us from the hall, and I led the way to Jean's room.

Craig looked like a blackened corpse on a bier, as the men laid his form tenderly upon the snowy sheets.

Bain had pulled himself together. "I'm not needing a bed, Cameron," he said; "I'll just rest a bit—I'm thinking I'll be no good at the fire."

MacFarlane, who had steadied Bain as he limped to the house, looked at the big man with a power of hero worship in his eyes.

"I'm afraid the poor lad's done for entirely," Bain wailed. "I'll wait to hear what Weston says."

In her room Jean was sitting beside the bed, her face paler than ever, waiting for the verdict, as Doctor Weston examined the battered body of her brother.

I could do nothing but help the Memsahib bring such things as the Doctor from time to time called for in a quick, low voice. Sheets were torn into bandages, sweet oil and vaseline requisitioned, and even then, when the Doctor's skill had done what it could, his verdict was one of indecision. Craig was not dead—that was all. There was evidently some serious injury though—an unlocated fracture or internal hurt. Then Bain's wounds were dressed.

During a lull in the physical salvage within the house, I stood watching the dragon of destruction consume the bones of the church.

Tongues of fire, eating through the roof, lapped angrily at grotesque smoke forms that fled heavenward. At times there was the boom of falling timbers or a dislodged stone. The chimneys fell with the grinding crash of an avalanche, sending a myriad cloud of starlike glowing cinders up from between the walls.

At first the steeple rose like a black marble monolith; then, glazed by the lurid vermilion, its tin-shingled sides glittered as a golden pagoda, to pass in transformation, as the flame-tongues licked its bones to a skeleton, into a tapering network of fireline design; a giant fern, its fronds diamond-lighted by sun-kissed dewdrops. It was weirdly beautiful penciled against the black sky in running letters of red and yellow. Hissing serpents darted up its steep incline, vomiting particles of fire that, carried by the wind, glinted like stars, and then were swallowed up in the night. But presently its wooden structure was consumed by the monster that roared as he fed;

it swayed drunkenly, and then came down between the stone walls of the kiln that belched upward like a volcano.

"I'm going to make hot coffee for the firemen," Memsahib said, coming to me. "They'll be wet and tired, and will need something. The coffee will be better than liquor for them."

I knew what she meant. Because of Munro and his crusade against drinking, some of those who toiled across the way, had been won from intemperance, but this would be an hour of trial for them. The village was hospitable; the tavern-keeper generous to a fault; in mistaken kindness there would be open bar for the gallant men.

"Will you go, husband, and ask the lads to come as they can—a few at a time?" the Memsahib asked. "I'll put a lunch on the dining table—they can help themselves; and Sarah will keep plenty of coffee steaming hot. Tell them that, husband, please, steaming hot."

"Wise little woman," I praised, patting her cheek; "and don't forget Jean. Slip up and give her a word of encouragement."

I gave the firemen Memsahib's message; and as the chance came they hurried across, singly and in twos and threes, for the steaming bowl that was better than liquor.

Once as I stood in the study I heard a rustle on the stairway, and Jean came into the room.

"I've come to thank you, Mr. Bain," she said, holding out her hand to Malcolm. "The Doctor has been telling me how you risked your life for my brother. You are a brave, good man."

She turned away quickly. Passing me I could see in the lamplight tears glistening on her pale cheeks.

Teacher had disappeared; I thought perhaps she was in Jean's room helping the doctor. But now she slipped into the house like a wan, frightened little hare—a very damp draggled hare; not only her skirts dripping wet, but her face a course for a river of tears.

"Where have you been, Miss Harkett?" I asked.

"Across the way. Oh, Doctor Cameron, it's dreadful! The organ is destroyed, and we'll never get another one—we haven't the money!"

"Don't trouble about that, Miss Harkett—we can't help it."

"We might have helped it. It's like a visitation of the wrath of God for all the dissension and falling from grace."

"Well, we can't help that either; but you can help getting soaked with water, and catching your death of cold—that's very unwise."

"I just don't care, Doctor Cameron; I'm ready to give up!" and the little body gave way to a passionate flood of tears.

"Come, Miss Harkett, you must change your wet trappings; Allis will give you something dry to put on. You're killing yourself with excitement; we must put you to bed."

I called the Memsahib—who took Teacher to her room.

When the Memsahib came back she said: "Was there ever such a conscience-troubled goose? She's now working herself into a fever, saying that it's all her fault, and the organ's fault, and Heaven knows what."

"The organ's fault! the excitement has unbalanced her; what is she talking about?"

"That God is angry because the organ drove Mrs. Paisly and old Jimmie Johnston out of the congregation."

"She's just upset," I answered. "The organ has been like a child to her, and its destruction has unnerved her. She'll be all right in the morning. Give her a cup of hot coffee, and cover her up; Nature will put her all right."

One of the last to come for coffee was Sweeny; and even then, with two hours of heroic toil crusted on him, his eyes were still big with the light of battle, his gaunt frame, whipcord and bone and parchment, still of elastic springiness.

He tilted a cup at his lean lips, and its seething contents were gone.

"B'ys!" he ejaculated, pluralizing my oneness, for we were alone, and dropping the cup back to its saucer with an emphatic clatter, "yon was devil's work."

"The fire?" I questioned, startled.

"Faith, I don't know about that, but the knockin' down of Bain was fair murder."

"They said it was an accident."

"Accident be damned! It was murder, I tell you; an' God's judgment on the Divil's spawn—curse his black heart! —that took the cowardly chanst."

"Who was it?" I asked, my voice dropping to an involuntary whisper.

"Who was it? Who's been makin' his boasts that he'd git even wid Bain for throwin' him in the pig sty?—Archie MacKillop. I seen it—I seen the devil's face acrost in the windie when Malcolm and Bob dropped. I tell ye, man, Archie's eyes was fair jumpin' from their sockets. The curse o' God on such as that black-hearted coward. B'ys, b'ys, b'ys! but it was cowardly!"

"We must investigate," I said, "we can't let it go by. If Craig dies——"

"You'll never prove it—damn him!—never. He'll claim that he was helpin'—that he was keepin' the fire down on the floor—that the pressure was too strong fer him. The Divil just throwed the chanst his way an' he took it—the black-hearted skunk! But if ever I git a chanst at him, may the Lord forgive me, an' stay me hand short of murder. B'ys, b'ys! To throw a man to his death—it was near his death—that was riskin' his life to save a rapscallion that wasn't worth goin' into that pit of fire for! I'm goin' back; we've got her under control—the big stone walls saved themselves, and that's about all that's left."

Sweeny's words filled me with unutterable depression. An accident and the possible loss of life, no matter how useless that life, was sad to contemplate, but that here in our little village of law and order we had one a cowardly murderer, was a thought seeming to drag us all down in the human scale. Even the elevating example of Bain's heroic effort failed to neutralize this dreadful glimpse of depravity.

I sought to escape from these things of felony by shutting the door of the dining room behind me, like locking them in a cell, as I passed to the study where Bain was resting on a couch.

"Are you feeling better, Malcolm?" I asked, drawing a chair beside him.

"I'm not bad," he answered; "my eyes trouble a bit, but I can see. I was afraid that I'd been blinded. Everything was black when I got out—before I got out; I just groped my way to that door. I knew the road well—I'd been over it often—or I'd never have made the open. But the door was locked—Oh!"

Bain coughed.

"My lungs are fair scorched, I'm thinking," he added apologetically. "When I found the door fast I thought it was all up, for I hadn't much left in the way of strength. I just heaved against it when they smashed the lock and tumbled out head first."

"You did a brave thing, Malcolm, to go down into that inferno—to the basement after Robert."

"You mustn't make too much of it, man," he answered, with plaintive seriousness; "for, would you believe it, I was just in a funk all the time."

"You acted like it," I declared sarcastically.

"It wasn't bad below. I just looked down where poor Craig had dropped and the fire wasn't bad there at all, it was mainly in the other end of the kirk. And I thought I'd make the back door of the basement easier than I'd come up through the window."

"Malcolm, you're just telling lies," I said. "You were thinking of nothing but saving Craig, and you knew you were taking the shortest kind of a chance on your own life. How did it happen that the boy was there at all; do you know?"

"That's been bothering me," Malcolm answered. "I saw him at the meeting, and I was a bit shamed, for, poor chap, I could see he was the worse for the drink. He was sitting over in a corner near the furnace. I thought at the time he was asleep, and I was glad of it. He must have slipped down on the bench, or perhaps to the floor. Coming out from the meeting everybody was talking about what had been done, and he was overlooked, I suppose. I'm sure I forgot all about him."

"And old Tommy the caretaker is that blind he would

never see anything when he was putting out the lights," I added.

"No, he wouldn't. I suppose the lad woke up with the fire all about him; that's how he was like a horse in a burning stable, just fair crazy. And when he rushed up the choir stairs there he was cut off again."

"The fire must have started from the furnace," I said.

"We'll never know that. It's not going regular yet, and old Tommy put on a wood fire to take the chill off for the meeting. Most likely he dropped a coal among the wood—there was some piled beside the furnace, I saw."

"Well, the cause is nothing now, the effect—the terrible result, dwarfs that into insignificance. Your miraculous escape makes us thankful that it is no worse," I said.

Bain drew a long breath that ended in a cough. "It's the smoke," he said; "I can taste it."

A grotesque smile flitted over his lips—grotesque, indeed fiercely droll he looked, the stubble of his singed beard and mustache standing out stiffly like the growth on a tramp's face.

"I'm thinking," he said, "that they'll not preach the pulpit vacant come Sabbath—the Lord's ahead of them. Perhaps," he added, "though I shouldn't say it, it's His hand we saw manifest to-night. He worketh in mysterious ways, and I have a feeling that we'll have Munro back before the pulpit's ready for an occupant."

"Teacher thinks it's a judgment on the congregation for its dissension. The members will have to unite now, anyway, over rebuilding the kirk."

"It'll mean a bit of debt, too," Bain sighed. "What's it like now," he asked, as I came back from a look at the fire.

"It is out," I answered; "just smoldering."

Almost immediately the body of firemen came to the house to ask after Bain, and report that it was now considered safe to go home, leaving one reel and a guard over the smoldering ruins.

Backed by Doctor Weston's orders, I persuaded Bain to take a bed for the night in my house.

All through the dark hours, dark in every way, we fought in Jean's room the silent battle, heritage of the fierce fire.

One, two, three, four o'clock—still, silent, mysterious hours; hours in which disaster grows—like shadows—overmasteringly strong; hours to steep one's spirit in despair. Sometimes I sat in my study, thinking dismal thoughts in unison with the monotonous tick-tick, tick-tick of the mantel clock, of how our simple life at the Hedge had drifted into tragedy, and its sinister whisper of inhuman crime. Where would it end?

Above my head was a muffled sound of feet where a life hung in the balance; and across the road smoking ruins cut jagged lines against a starlit sky. Even the leaves on the maples were shriveled to death by the destroying heat.

At times, with almost noiseless steps, the Memsahib came to me, begging that I would go to rest. But she would not leave Jean, and so I, too, could not sleep.

Early the street filled with curious villagers, solemn of face, who moved about like convicts of a chain-gang; on their spirits a weight of disaster that unconsciously suggested something beyond the ordinary mundane happenings of life. The church destroyed seemed to have removed the guarding care

of God. They were sheep without a fold; restless, magnifying the material loss into a spiritual deprivation.

We of the Hedge were almost too much depressed for words. I had not slept at all.

On the lawn Jean came to me saying: "I feel that I shall choke—I want to fill my lungs with air."

"How is Robert?" I asked; "any change for the better? has anything been done—can anything be done?"

"We seem just helpless," she answered bitterly. "He hovers, the doctor says.' His body lies there on the cot, broken, disfigured; I can stretch out my hand and touch it; but the poor boy himself, his spirit, I cannot find. I can just pray to his Maker for mercy for him. The prayer of the righteous availeth much, it is written that way, Doctor Cameron, but what are mine—will they be answered—will they avail? In my heart I cry, 'Why am I tried?' All that I love is blighted, and in despair, I cry out against God's vengeance. And then I pray, pleading: 'Merciful God! lessen the load—spare my brother—give me back my husband.'"

"You are overtired Jean," I ventured, soothingly. "Robert is certainly now brought close into the hand of God, and you must drive from your mind these doubts, these questionings."

"I try—I plead—I offer contrition; I will never doubt, I will force myself to resignation if my brother be spared. He isn't ready. If he dies now will he be punished for all eternity for the sin that was not his—that had been handed down to him?"

"We mustn't discuss it, Jean—not now; we must just try to save his life."

I was glad when the children came eagerly from the

house, bringing their young lives as a revivifying tonic to our somber mood.

They were materialists, their vision short-focused to reality; the spiritual, the metaphysical, everything was eliminated but the actuality of the fire. It was a building that had been burned; and the wondrousness of the hose reel that threw water without pumping filled them with astonishment. Their philosophy was healthy. Somehow it drew us, Jean and myself, closer to the air, and the sunlight, and the sky, and the trees which were still with us, though not clothed as they had been yesterday.

Kippie, youngest, having traveled the shortest journey into life's field of care, was loquacious; while Laddie, his enthusiasm roused by the doings of the night, declared he was going to be a fireman when he grew up. And he was going to be a hero like everybody was saying Mr. Bain was; only in his book the hero was a man who killed people and then married the princess. Then how was Mr. Bain a hero if he didn't kill anybody?

Teacher had not appeared; and presently when Memsahib joined us she struggled in vain to smooth a troubled look from her face.

"Miss Harkett is not very well this morning," Memsahib said; "she has caught cold, and is nervously excited. She's had trouble with her heart before—I must have Doctor Weston look at her when he comes."

"I thought he was here still," I said.

"He went home for breakfast—I couldn't induce him to remain. Breakfast is ready now. Try to eat something, dear," she said, putting her hand on Jean's shoulder. "Malcolm is with Robert, and I'm going to remain, too, until you

have had something to eat. Doctor Weston has telegraphed to York for a nurse," she added turning to me, "and she should be here by nine o'clock."

"I can't eat," Jean answered wearily; "I should choke—I'm going up to my brother. You have breakfast with your family, Allis."

The Memsahib's breakfast consisted in taking a cup of tea and toast, and her own homemade currant jelly up to Miss Harkett.

Even with the children strung like a garland of flowers about the table it was a gloomy breakfast. I, tortured over the vicissitudes of Lilac Hedge, drank my coffee in a hospital for crushed bodies and stricken souls.

Presently I heard the heavy step of Doctor Weston on the stairway, and after a time he came down to where I sat in the study.

"You look tired, Doctor," I said.

"Yes, I haven't had my clothes off for forty-eight hours. I had two long drives to patients in the country, night before last—that's the joy of a country doctor's life—and last night, of course, we were all busy."

"How are your two patients?" I asked.

"I have three now. Bain is all right—at least he's burned and bruised enough to keep weaklings like you or me in bed, I dare say, but he's very much of a horse—at any rate he can go home now. I'm altogether lost over Craig. He's badly injured in some part of his anatomy. He's still unconscious, but that's just as well! that part of it is chiefly due to exhaustion—his system has been gutted by alcoholic fire till his spirit lives in a half-furnished tenement, so he has just collapsed. But I'm fearful that there's an injury to the spine,

probably when he fell. I'm going to send to York for Doctor Colton for a consultation."

"Can you give us any encouragement at all about Craig?" I asked; "something for his sister to build on—she needs it, poor body."

"I know—I understand. You may be sure I'll fight pretty hard for his life. You'll be justified in offering her encouragement—you may say I'm very hopeful; that will be something. But I'm concerned over Miss Harkett."

I started. There was a serious look in his solemn gray eyes that frightened me.

"Teacher!—isn't it just a little cold?"

"Yes, a cold—but not a little one. Her heart is going like a trip hammer; and nerves! they're like floss silk, vibrating at every touch—it's a wonder she didn't drop last night. She always was a fretty little body; the sweetest creature in the world, and the most conscientious Christian—her real disease is organ on the brain."

"I know," I interjected; "fretting about the destroyed church organ."

"Yes. You'd better get her home, Cameron—she'll be more contented. She's worrying over being a trouble here to Mrs. Cameron. I'll go my rounds and come back."

CHAPTER XV

THE conflagration had left a governing influence upon the village. The fire seemed to have lapped at the uncharitable hearts of the gossips, incinerating the venom, leaving what little of gold there was, and a better spirit breathed in the atmosphere.

Church matters had taken a wider scope, touching the adherents in their most vital spot—the pocket; dwarfing the question of a pastor, subduing the enmity to Neil Munro; on everybody's tongue was the paramount query, Where was the money to come from to rebuild the church and supply the organ?

Wise old Bain saw his opportunity and seized upon it with big-hearted avidity. He confided to me his plan to utilize this secular difficulty in cornering the spiritual market.

"The loudest exhorters will be the most near over contributing," said Malcolm. "They'll figure that speech is golden and offer it instead of the baser coin. They'll be full of wise counsel over raising the wind, but they'll pull a long face of hard times, smut in wheat, murrin in the cattle—heavens knows what all, to keep from giving. I'll just let them dawdle along until I see they're fair stuck, then I'll

give a round sum out of hand, and I'll loan them more at a low interest—on condition, aye, on condition."

Without asking, I knew what the condition would be—a longer waiting for Munro's return.

The preaching vacant of the pulpit would now be somewhat incongruous; the pulpit was not only vacant, but nonexistent. The town hall was improvised as a kirk; an ill-befitting temple within which to induct a new pastor. The square, unadorned, uncarpeted Municipal Chamber, cold and cheerless, was enough to damp the ardor of even Minister Grey. The austere Scots could well take it that God would feel their presence there as well as in their own orthodox edifice, but this unusual function would lose its impressive solemnity enacted in the town hall, and religion to the Calvinists, shorn of its profound attributes, was something akin to the gimcrack hurly-burly of the Salvationists.

The first Sabbath's gathering for worship in the town hall completely divorced Minister Grey's aspirations from the desire of the majority. His peevish, squeaky voice rose fitfully in the acoustically ill-balanced chamber. He was like a dreary locust rasping in a barren field.

A melodeon had been impressed into the song service of the Lord, and, Teacher being ill, a volunteer substitute, in the person of a very nervous girl, obtained.

I think even the stanchest elder felt that a very wretched testimony had been offered up to the Creator that day. The chairs and the benches screeched on the hardwood floor, wailing the irritating treble of little Minister Grey to nothingness. Resignation to the will of God was his theme, interpreted from the text: "The wall of Jerusalem is broken down and the gates thereof are burned with fire."

It was all about that the kirk had been destroyed, as Jerusalem had, because of sin, and, somehow it appeared from the Minister's exhortation that he, like Nehemiah, would build it up again, bringing the Lord's favor to bear upon the work.

I was thinking he would have a more difficult task bringing all the Mac-Somethings freely to the work, than Nehemiah had had with the men of Judah.

I fancy that everyone felt as I did, that while we might subdue our spirits to acceptance of such trials as the burning of the kirk, it was just a little too much to take on the trying yoke of Minister Grey for an indefinite period.

I surmised that after that Sabbath, Bain's prophetic hope that Munro would occupy the rebuilt pulpit would materialize so far as Minister Grey was concerned.

The consultation with Doctor Colton over Craig's condition left the case somewhat as it was before—problematical. The boy had regained consciousness, but an indicated paralysis of the lower limbs confirmed Doctor Weston's hurried diagnosis that the spine had suffered. The evident injuries, burns and bruises, were unimportant, though they had added in a shock to the nervous system.

Dr. Colton's advice had been to wait for time's development; nursing and care would cure the patient of everything but the suspected bone fracture, whether of the spine or hip joints.

So at the Hedge we were in a state of solicitous suspense. I think that, strangely enough, the care of her brother benefited Jean. The nerves, fed by action, worked more smoothly than they had when irritated by the brooding brain.

That Jean's nature was altogether lovable I came to

see more clearly under these conditions. Perhaps it was that unselfish subjection of her own affliction to her brother's needs had brought its own physical reward. It had been said in the village—it must have been iterated and reiterated many times, for I had heard it—that Jean was cold, unsympathetic, selfish, in that she watched her brother's slow, alcoholic suicide with passive indifference; that because he was a drunkard she drew the fine linen of irreproachableness across her eyes that she might not see the unpleasant vision of a relative disgraced; that she avoided him out of a heartless antipathy to her legitimate duty; that, figuratively, like Cain, she said: "Am I my brother's keeper?"

No one had ever heard her reproach Robert; no one had heard her speak of his infirmity. Sphinxlike she had sat through the years of his retrogression, unspeaking, immutably silent in tongue and eye. Where she should have wept tears of bitterness, she gave no sign.

It was thus the village had summed up its judgment of not-understanding, superficially reading the outer page, ignorant of the bitter story of suffering and sorrow that was engraved in the heart of the sister.

Now we of the Hedge had opportunity to observe the world of love this woman—herself needing sustainment from sympathy—poured out like a river of wine over the poor wrecked lad who lay helpless, his big eyes watching her as a babe follows the movements of a mother.

Grandma Murdoch came many times and forced Jean, with gentle words of reproach, to go out into the sunlight, or to lie down for a little rest in the day, or to seek sleep at night; and the Memsahib did the same. And I brought my authority to bear to the same end.

Sisterly love! yea, I came to know that it was as great, as deep, as abiding as the love that is the theme for bards, as I watched Jean in these sad days.

Of course, from the very first there was the question of the part alcohol was to play in the treatment of the patient. Dr. Weston was an unusually common-sense practitioner, brushing aside theoretical formulas in favor of his loved assistant Nature. "Wait, have patience," was engraved in his quiet, thoughtful blue-gray eyes. "No violence to the good Dame, my masters, but just a little humoring of her, and a little of learning lessons from her." I am sure he talked like this to himself.

However, he said of Craig: "His system will crave the food it has fed upon——"

"Is it a food, Doctor?" I asked; "I have read that——"

"Yes," he interrupted, "one may read himself to destruction. I will admit that alcohol is a *bad* food, but just now we will bend it to our needs. The patient will require a very, very little."

If I regretted this, hoping that perhaps a chance had come to essay a cure of Robert's diseased appetite, Jean rebelled. She pleaded with the Doctor, argued with him, besought him, saying: "It is a poison that searches out the innermost recess, the niche in which the soul has its existence. Cannot his physical strength be sustained except at the cost of his eternal life? You say he may recover; but to come back to a life that is a living death— It is hard to say it I know, God must forgive me, but this would be worse than if he died with the renunciation of strong drink as atonement."

The doctor wavered. "It's risky," he said, in his com-

mon-sense manner—"it's risky to switch the human system abruptly."

"But if ever we are to look for help from God in the saving of my brother it must be now. If He sends blessings in disguise we are justified in accepting this evident affliction as such. Will you try, doctor? Will you try without the liquor and watch, and when you say that it is unsafe, that Robert's life is imperiled, I will bow to the inevitable—I will myself give him this soul-drug that you call brandy."

Dr. Weston yielded reluctantly; and Jean labored like a slave over preparing the substituted stimulant that was also a true food, the expressed beef's blood.

That day after Jean's impassioned plea to Doctor Weston, I had from her own lips the refutation of the village story of her indifference. Perhaps she felt that I might consider her fanatically opposed to liquor. Like a child's extenuation for accused evil was the story of her long fight against the serpent that had wound its sinuous coils about her brother. As she talked I discerned with ho uch wisdom she had striven, saving his pride by letting no ear but his own hear her pleadings and her warnings and her prayers, for sometimes, in his hours of depressed weakness, Robert had knelt beside his sister in prayer, and asked of his Maker strength to reclaim himself, pleading that the curse of inherited appetite might be removed. It was a bitter, sad tale, just the voicing of a despairing struggle.

"Of course, you know," Jean said, "how my husband strove to save Robert from his evident doom."

"I have heard that he was very bitter against the drinking so prevalent in the village. He took a strong stand, and made enemies over it; but he was a conscientious servant of his

Master, and I don't see what else he could have done. I suppose," I added, "that this passion for drink has ruined more homes in the village than all other causes combined—don't you think so?"

Jean did not answer at once, and looking at her quickly I saw a most unearthly pallor upon her features; her face was drawn with abject misery.

"You are ill—you have overdone yourself—don't talk any more," I pleaded.

"I am better now," she added. "It was just a spasm; my nerves are tricky. What you say is true, Doctor Cameron, but you do not know the full depth of the misery this cursed thing entails. Do you know what a home is in which lurks this monster? It is a living hell—it is like those homes in India where they harbor a cobra, not knowing the minute the serpent may strike in the dark."

"You have known it," I said, "but let us hope that it is now past."

"Yes, my God! I have known it. If I could tell you all—all—everything— No, a thousand times, no—I can't—I mustn't!"

I was startled by Jean's vehemence, but I attributed it to her overtried nerves.

"Neil tried everything to save Robert. He pitted himself against an army of destroyers—men who were always ready to drink with the boy and tempt him. In desperation my husband—as a last resort, prohibited the hotel from selling liquor to Robert. This could never cure the disease—King Alcohol is too powerful to be bound by a law unless the law destroys him utterly."

"I fancy Neil thought this a mistake," I said, "for didn't

he remove this embargo the day he disappeared—that was probably the reason, wasn't it?"

Jean hesitated, and her face had paled again. Then she answered simply, "No, that wasn't the reason."

Jean's words, and a shrinking look of fear in her eyes, chased my thoughts back to Munro's study; the quarrel that had taken place there between him and Robert; the boy's mysterious actions the day we had searched the room together. A numbing cloud of shadowy questions and suspicions crowded my brain tumultuously. There had been some extraordinary happening—what was it?

I was roused by Jean saying: "Perhaps God has given me this chance to save my brother from a drunkard's grave. I had almost lost faith—even now it seems so hard to think that Robert must be crushed, his body sacrificed to save his soul."

"He won't be sacrificed, Jean," I said; "we'll pull him through, and I believe it will work a cure."

A wan smile lighted up her face, and she answered: "You always give me hope—affliction is not all affliction when it brings such friends as I have found here."

CHAPTER XVI

MISS HARKETT had been under Doctor Weston's care during these days. She had improved—quieted down after the first attack of riotous nerves. We had been lulled into a false sense of security as was proven, for one day Doctor Weston came hurriedly for the Memsahib, and in a little she returned, saying: "John, I wish you would go for Mrs. Paisly and bring her to see Teacher."

Memsahib's expression of misery made useless the question that I asked: "What's wrong—has Teacher had a relapse?"

We were standing in the hallway, and she, putting her arms about my neck buried her face in my shoulder, sobbing: "She is going to die. O God! will the bitterness ever pass, will the time of trial ever cease? We are like a scourge-swept city, a place visited by divine wrath. The sweetest little woman that ever breathed, that has given her whole life for the good of others, and now she is cut off with never a season of rest."

"Why bring Mrs. Paisly, girl—what can she do?"

"She can make happy Teacher's last moments if she wishes. What a pure little life it has been; nothing troubling

her conscience but remorse that Mrs. Paisly has left the congregation because of the organ. If Teacher can reconcile the old lady to the church here she'll die happy."

"I'll bring the old Puritan," I answered, "and she'll indeed be an infidel, barren of human love, if she sticks out."

The old lady lived at Paisly's Corners, two miles beyond the village, so I drove to her abode.

A desolate quietude shrouded the Corners; a forest, an expanse of tilled plain, even wild mountain rocks would have been less dreary than Paisly's Corners. A small stone blacksmith shop, as rigidly uncompromising as a rock, threw a shadow on the cross-roads from its roof. On the opposite corner two frame buildings, the unpainted boards weathered to blue-gray, stood sullenly apart, separated by a dilapidated picket fence. It was this weak gregarian effort of the inhabitants that rendered the Corners so pitiably desolate. They were like lepers outcasted from the grander isolation of farm life and ostracized from the village community.

In the blacksmith shop a hammer tinkled on an anvil like a monk's bell; and from the solitary chimney on one of the neutral tinted dwellings a tiny streamer of smoke filtered upward as if the spirit of the fire sought a wider existence.

I tied my horse to a gate post and knocked upon a door.

"Good day, Mrs. Paisly," I said, when it was opened.

"Good day tae you, Doctor Cameron—I hope you're vera weel. Come in, come in, Doctor. Your knock gi'e me a shock," she said, as, dusting a chair with her apron, she drew it beside a square box-stove for me. This was force of habit—there was no warmth in the stove; it was a little fire temple that no doubt had drawn forth in confessional many a bit of scandal gossip.

"I'm sorry if I frightened you," I said.

"You did, and you didna', Doctor. We dinna ha'e many callers, and I was fearin' Janet's David had come by an accident. Yon's his hoose,"—her thumb shot over her shoulder. "He wouldna' come in workin' 'oors gang there was naething wrong," she explained, "though we often foregather for a bit sociable converse o' an evening."

"You haven't many visitors, then, Mrs. Paisly?"

"Weel, we ha'e an' dinna ha'e. No vera desirable ones, as a rule. Come Friday it'll be a week, a lightnin'-rod peddler just swooped doon on the Corners wi' his ungodly tricks; a bit iron he was for stickin' up tae avert the hand o' the Almighty. Says I tae him: 'You're thinkin' tae cope wi' the Lord, man—tak' care ye dinna be struck doon yersel' for your blasphemous thoughts.' I'll tell ye what it is, Doctor Cameron," the old lady continued, swinging restlessly back and forth in her big wooden rocker, "the farmers an' folk like oorsel's in the villages are just prey for city sharks."

"That's why you jumped when I knocked at the door, was it, Mrs. Paisly?"

"Aye; but ye ken, Doctor, I hadna time to tak' a peep through the glass; an' the first I kenned o' your comin' was the bang at the door. I was puttin' doon plums for a bit kitchen to the bread—it saves mony a poond o' butter, does the jam."

"They look very sweet and appetizing," I complimented, nodding to a row of jars that stood on her kitchen table.

"An' like mony a comely lass's face—their looks just a' l'e—just standin' monuments tae the deceit o' *peddlers.*" Her accent on the peddlers was a treat in its acrid intensity.

To humor the garrulous body I said, "How's that, Mrs. Paisly?"

I was impatient with my mission, but I knew her well. There was the peace of a dying woman at stake—a ruffling haste would surely breed a spirit of obstinacy. I was drawing her into my depth, that my request might be honored.

"It was this way, Doctor. It's gone eight years syne my husband was gored be a bull. He was a gran' man, was John Paisly—the same name as yoursel', Doctor—there's a stability aboot the name John, I'm pleased wi' the profound roll o' it; Archie or Sandy are too lightsome tae my mind. Weel, John d'e'd o' the bull's attack. We were back on the farm yon time, an' I got that miserable wi' lonesomeness that I could dae naething but mope; I was failin'. An' David—John's brother, him that haes the smithy yonder—advised me tae sell the farm an' live here at the Corners where it's sae cheerful. I picked up at once. I couldna' ha'e stood it anither year yonder."

"You find it brighter here?" I asked, thinking of the wonderful potentiality that comparative conditions held, and trying to picture the greater desolation that she had fled from.

"Aye, I'm vera satisfied wi' the Corners. Through the open window I can hear the bang o' David's hammer smiting the iron; an' I take strange humors aboot it. Sometimes I liken it tae the clang o' Moses' rod on the rock when the waters gushed oot. In the winter mony a time I'll peek through the glass thinkin' it's sleigh bells I'm hearin'. But the gran' company is bein' sae near the railway track—it's just yonder halfway o' the field; an' the freight trains are passin' three or four times a day. The engine has tae blaw

the whistle at the crossing yonder, an' it's the cheerfullest soond imaginable. I maun say I dinna like their blawing on the Sabbath—it's a pity they canna dae enough wark on six days wi'out desecrating the Lord's ane."

I sat patiently, casting furtive, even strong glances at the plum jars, hoping to draw the garrulous body's mind to the question at issue, for the iniquity of the plums settled, I meant to state my errand.

A sizzling on the kitchen stove, a pungent odor of burned sugar, luckily cut into Mrs. Paisly's reminiscences and she darted with surprising agility to the salvage of her boiling over fruit.

"It's just that, Doctor," she resumed on her return, "the ruination quantity o' sugar them plums tak'. As I was sayin' when the kettle interrupted me, I was na sooner here at the Corners, the acre o' land no' fenced yet, when a fruit tree peddler happens along; they're like vultures wi' their swoopin' doon on hones' folk. He haes a buik wi' glamourous pictures o' plums the size o' peaches, an' peaches the size o' King o' Thompkins apples, an' apples as big as melons. I had my doots o' all that, but he just talked me roond an' I paid a fearfu' price for six plum trees. Man alive! I signed for trees, but when they came they were whiffet spindle-shank things like gooseberry bushes; an' they grew that slow I was tired o' waitin' for them. An' then the plums! Look for yoursel', Doctor."

Mrs. Paisly brought from a basket for my inspection a handful of green and purple plums the size of hickory nuts.

"That's why I ca' them a standin' l'e," she said. "But yon godless peddler will get his deserts when he goes where there are na plums."

"I suppose he disappeared—he never came back to ask how your plums were doing, did he, Mrs. Paisly?"

My question brought forth the most extraordinary, irrelevant answer—I suppose it was the idea of the disappearing peddler that switched her active mind. She simply writhed in the big chair at the past entire subversion of her innate curiosity, ejaculating: "Saints above! Doctor, I'm daft—just daft, not to be asking after Jeanie Craig's man. Is there ony word o' Minister Munro this week?"

"None," I answered.

"Dreadful! the puir body! In a temporal sense I'm meaning, Doctor, for I canna bring mysel' to a harmonious sympathy wi' the spiritual goings on that's come tae the Kirk in Iona. They're going tae build it up again, ye were saying."

I hadn't said so, but she continued: "Perhaps they'll no' be sae keen aboot trifling wi' the solemnities noo."

She looked at me so searchingly that I was driven to ask: "How are you meaning, Mrs. Paisly?"

"Just that by the time the kirk's finished they'll no' feel like frittering awa' money for an organ. I dinna say it is, mind ye, Doctor, for I'm no' ane tae interpret the mysterious way o' the Lord, but the destruction o' that godless instrument is like a visitation."

I seized upon the opening and thrust forward what was in my mind. "Whatever they decide upon," I said, "the saddest part of it will be that Miss Harkett will not be there as organist."

"Little Teacher? Goodness, Doctor, that was the ane prick tae ma conscience that yon sweet little Christian was troubled o'er the stand I took. Would ye believe it, Doctor,

she's walked a' the way oot here tae the Corners tae win me o'er. Man, I just had tae steel my heart tae what I considered my duty tae God. Tears would come frae the body's e'es; an' her pleading—aye, she is a Christian, though I couldna' understand her infatuation for the drooning, snoring pipes. Is Teacher going awa', Doctor?"

"I'm afraid she's going on a very long journey, Mrs. Paisly— she's dying!"

"D'eing! little Teacher d'eing?"

Mrs. Paisly rose and paced the floor. I sat silent, wondering what was passing in her mind. She seemed to have forgotten my presence. She opened a little cabinet nailed to the wall, and took out a knitted shawl.

"D'ye see that, Doctor? Teacher worked that wi' her own hands an' gi' it me last Christmas, making me promise to wear it when I was driving tae service at Stonehill. An' noo she's d'eing. Puir body. I must awa' in tae see her. Can I see her, Doctor—just tae kiss her good-by, for I'll be hoping tae meet her in heaven, for she's ane o' the Chosen."

"I came out for you, Mrs. Paisly," I said simply. "Teacher is asking for you, and you can comfort her last moments. Can you come back with me now?"

"Indeed I can. The plums are that soor they'd no' take hurt if they soaked i' sugar for a month. I'll just ask Janet tae keep an eye tae their stewing. I'll be wi' you in a jiffy. Janet'll fair greet when she kens Teacher's sae poorly. Dearie me, dearie me! Poor little Teacher!"

Lamenting, Mrs. Paisly slipped to summon her relative, and as they were back, Janet thrusting the door open suddenly, I saw over her shoulder a handkerchief furtively obliterating tears.

Soon we were on the way to Iona, I striving for an opening to prepare the way for Mrs. Paisly's reconciliation to the organ. But what was I to do in such a delicate mission—a man bungler? Perhaps my patience in listening to the tale of the acrid plums would be something in a preparatory way.

The Memsahib came out as I drove to the gate of little Teacher's home. She stood for a second with her hand in the old lady's, saying: "You had better send the horse away till you are needing him again, John. I'll bring Mrs. Paisly to the Hedge for tea, then you can drive her back."

What would be the result of the Scotchwoman's visit, I questioned over and over, waiting at home for the Memsahib's coming. Would that wondrous, indefinable, evanescent, enduring, ethereal, ever-recurrent element, love, subdue the fanatical obduracy of the Calvinistic Mrs. Paisly, where argument and exhortation and the influence of the whole church set had failed? It would be a curious study in theopsychology. It would be something like Christ pitting His doctrine of love and gentleness against the harsh tenets of the Jews. Would gentle, dying Teacher transmit something of the broader religious spirit to the woman bred within the narrow environment of uncompromising spiritual austerity? And Mrs. Paisly had declared that she would never countenance the desecration of God's tabernacle by what she firmly believed was an innovation of the Devil.

And also well I knew that he who hoped to convince a Scot against his will had a task such as Mahomet undertook when he summoned the mountain; such as King Canute essayed when he bade the tide stay its advance.

Most certainly Teacher would fail.

Then I thought of Christ stilling the angry waters. In-

deed there was a greater power than Mahomet's or Canute's. Perhaps through Teacher Christ's love-power would prevail.

I saw the Memsahib and Mrs. Paisly coming up the walk. Something in the Scotchwoman's appearance suggested a softening of harsh lines; her angular face was gentler in expression, as though she had passed through a dozen years of refining influence; her steel-gray eyes radiated the questioning light of one who walks falteringly like a child, as if new worlds had opened up to her in mysterious beatitude.

I held the gate for them to enter, and Memsahib said softly: "Teacher is resting so happily."

"Is there any hope?" I asked.

"No; and it just seems as though it would be a sin to ask for anything but just what is. I never saw a person in the full joy of life and hope so perfectly happy, so contented! It's the saddest, most beautiful thing in all the world, Teacher's faith and resignation."

"Aye," Mrs. Paisly added. I started at the change in the Scotchwoman's voice; even the single expression "aye" carried the most wonderful note of softening.

"Teacher is just drifting intil the arms o' God," she continued, as I drew a chair for her. "It would be a black heart that could beat beside yon couch and keep tae harshness or evil thought."

"Mrs. Paisly has removed the last worry from Teacher's mind," the Memsahib said.

"And I thank God I had a chance tae do it," Mrs. Paisly added solemnly; "and I feel a load off my ain heart because o' it. I believe in conserving tha principles o' religion, but when Teacher spoke wi' me, something o' the speerit o' Christ seemed tae look frae her e'e, and hang on her

words. And when I gave up I felt a great sweetness o' relief warming aboot my heart. It's naething tae dee like yon Christian; she maun say: 'O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?'"

"We'll have a cup of tea Mrs. Paisly," Memsahib suggested—"you look tired."

"And I'll drive you home whenever you're ready," I added.

"With Mrs. Cameron's permission I'd like tae bide here till the end. The doctor thinks Teacher'll no' last till midnight."

Memsahib drew the Scotchwoman's withered face within her hands and kissed her tenderly, saying: "I'm glad you're going to wait—Teacher might forget, and ask for you—might think your coming had been just a vision."

"I'd like tae see Mrs. Munro—Jeanie Craig, as she always was," Mrs. Paisly said. "I'm afeered I've no' been as neighborly as I might. Perhaps I've been a bit set in my way through clinging tae the old style o' things."

"I'll ask her to come down," Memsahib answered; "she's up with Robert."

"Aye, there it goes again—I'm just selfish, indifferent, no' asking aboot the poor laddie. Hoo's he daing—I heerd he was bad hurted? It's just ane thing after anither—trouble a'togither for everybody."

Memsahib brought Jean to the lawn, and as I wandered about in and out of the house, restless because of the intense mental atmosphere, I could see the Scotchwoman who had told me at Paisly's Corners that she did not approve of the goings on in the kirk since Munro came, lavishing upon Jean sympathy, and encouragement to stand strong in the hour of

her trial. She was calling her "Jeanie," and holding her hand, and brushing little flecks of dust from her skirt with a handkerchief, and mothering her.

In my restless orbit, passing, I heard snatches of advice. "The Lord will put it a' right." And she wanted to know what were sparrows that fell and were seen of His eye, compared with a conscientious servant like Minister Neil. The shrewd Celtic eye of Mrs. Paisly, a grandmother herself, had discerned something. The Scotch voice was attuned to a baffling of the masculine ear, but notwithstanding this, at times intensified to clearness by this wondrous bond of sympathy between women, of motherhood, words leaped such distances as I could place between us. Once it was, "Jeanie, you'll be a happy woman then. Dearie, I remember when Aleck was born——"

I shut the study window—things of the lawn were sacred. I sat staring vacantly at a shelf of metaphysical volumes, wondering if there was anything within their leather covers that could teach me the true guiding spirit of this wonderful Celtic temperament, fierce as a Ghazi in religion, gentle and sweet as a dove in human feeling—all embodied *in excelsis* in Mrs. Paisly of Paisly's Corners.

We stood meekly face to face with the nearest manifestations of God's omnipotence—dissolution and evolution and creation thrust themselves—as new worlds bursting forth had appeared to Agamemnon on the walls of Troy—like illuminating stars across the dark sky, heralded, claimed of appearance by the tongue of the Scotchwoman, as she talked in solemn fervor of Teacher's approaching death and Jean's baby that was to be.

I heard the Memsahib say to Mrs. Paisly that she had

made the tea strong. Perhaps it was—what did it matter; before midnight something exquisite, something closely akin to Christ's spirit would have passed from us.

It was almost midnight when Teacher, her fingers lying in Mrs. Paisly's hand, just breathed her spirit away from us, so gently that Memsahib, not knowing that she had gone, whispered softly to her, "Ruth—Ruth, dear—it is I, Allis."

In the morning I drove Mrs. Paisly back to the Corners. Once she tried to speak of Teacher, but it was too much—she broke down. We traveled half a mile before she trusted her voice to say: "I maun grip mysel'—My! but I'm a shaughlin' old body!"

The mauve-tinted twin cottages of Paisly's Corners threw themselves across our vision at a turn in the road, and their intrusion awakened the everyday perceptions in my companion's mind.

"I'm wonderin' how Janet got on wi' the plums," she found voice to say. "Hooever, she couldna spoil them—they were that soor. I told her to just souce them wi' sugar. I'm no' carin' much. Do you ken, Doctor, I've a queer sad feelin' o' happiness; it doesna matter aboot the plums or onything; naething matters much. I'm reconciled tae my ain Kirk, and I've seen a guid Christian d'e, glad tae be wi' the Lord. The Corners look sae peaceful and restfullike tae me this morning. I'm hoping the trouble will pass frae Jeanie Craig—I'll ask it o' the Almighty to-night."

CHAPTER XVII

THE Agnostic was a perambulating query; his existence one long question—"Why?" His endeavor restless, persistent delving into the adamantine rocks of impenetrability. His very appearance resembled the printed query mark; large-browed head drooped forward from rounded shoulders; attenuated limbs ending in a dot at the bottom of which were his feet. A desire for knowledge, commendable no doubt, might yet turn to the frittering away of time and talent if the niche explored was like the old lady's cupboard, bare of even a bone of contention.

I had not seen him for a few days, and thought perhaps he had ostracized himself out of consideration for our mental unrest.

After I had returned from Paisly's Corners he found me sitting alone—at least in a companionship that was dually company and isolation, for Blitz lay on the bench, his head on my knee.

"It's curious," the Major said, "how the most tremendous throbbings of nature—or, as Schelling would have put it, Trinity Godhead—gallop here with a relentless stride

harnessed to the carriage of life beside a donkey of thistledown vacuity."

"You mean?" I queried.

"I mean, to begin at omega—the drifting thistledown—to-day I met Tommy, the sexton of the kirk that was. I've been away in New York for a couple of days, and this morning Tommy, meeting me, asked: 'How's tricks in New York, Major?'"

"That sounds good," I said; "what did you answer?"

"I replied that they were about as usual, and Tommy remarked: 'I suppose New York is the same as Iona, dull as ditch water. Poor crops flatten a town out quicker nor anything.'"

"Tommy has a limited perspective," I observed.

"That's just it," objected the Major, "he hasn't. New York is the same as the village—a place for transients. More or less gilding doesn't matter; to ride or to walk doesn't matter. The same thing that convulses us here at the present convulses the man yonder, millionaire or pauper—the happening to the body, and the uncertainty of the real journey through eternity."

"I think you're right, Major."

"You think! Well, that's as far as any man can go. Neither Hegel, nor Spinoza, nor Meister Eckhart could go beyond that—just to think."

"What of Minister Grey?" I hazarded in banter.

But the Agnostic seized upon it with avidity as material. "He's as provable as they are, and as unprovable; and out of his knowledge as inefficacious. But"—and the Major's voice grew low out of its own volition—"the little woman that died last night was a message."

"Of what?" I asked, thinking to trap him.

But the Agnostic fenced warily, as metaphysically as Meister Eckhart might have done. "That's what I'm asking myself," he answered. "Was it just a purity of life here, comparison inducing adulation, magnetically exacted tribute? I heard about it," he explained; "and if I, or you, or Minister Grey, had gone to that Scotch warrior of conviction, Mrs. Paisly, and asked her in the name of the Lord to yield, what would have happened?"

"But God chose the fitting instrument," I objected.

"But He had the ordained one—the minister, called for that purpose. It is difficult to determine just what is chance and what is of arrangement; or is there anything predestined to happen except the two things, evolution and dissolution—even these seem purely matters of chance, not even separate elements, just changes, varying phases of the one great essence, a noisy ripple in the matrix of quiet."

"There's nothing of chance work in God's scheme of creation," I answered. "Look at the Pleiades. Come back a thousand years from now, Major, and you will find them gradually circling with majestic sureness across the sky from east to west, and you can tell the day, the hour by the truth of their position."

"That's your short vision, Doctor," he contended. "Within them there are changes occurring—the happenings of chance. And if we're to believe Genesis they were not always as they are. But perhaps you can answer this question that troubles me not a little. There are the maple trees—they're all alike, aren't they?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Only superficially. Among all the maple leaves on

earth there are not two exactly alike, neither are there two trees alike. Sheep all look the same, but close observation discovers a difference; a farmer can come to know each individual sheep of his flock by its face. No two humans are exact counterparts. Even your twins—the mother can distinguish between them."

"That's the infinity of God's creative power," I asserted.

"Is it? Then man is infinite; for a carpenter could no more saw two boards the same length than he could create two hills without a valley between. I'll admit I've troubled over this question. Is it the wondrous infinity of a Godhead, or inability for perfection? Man was created in a certain image—some of them are a hideous reflection on the Model—and yet never one attains to the same form as the other."

"I don't know—I can't answer," I said.

"Neither can I, nor could Spinoza, nor Minister Grey."

"Why trouble?" I asked.

"A seeking for knowledge is commendable," the Major answered. "Galileo and Newton gave us a rich heritage because they were not content with not knowing."

"Yes, because Galileo was wise enough to stop at the outer limit; the stars were a border line between knowledge possible and impossible."

"But what's beyond the stars—nothing?"

"Teacher knows," I answered—"she *always* knew; just because she leaned on something greater than human knowledge."

"It was very beautiful and very good," the Major said sincerely. "A gentle sweet type of thistledown. There's another, a rougher texture, Sweeny with his ax-handle cure for physical ills. The M. D.'s, and the nostrums—I think

he tried everything in that line—failed to pluck the shadow-throwing string of delusion from his cap, but the ax-handle cured him; that and a diet of fried pork. What was that, Doctor?"

"Nature," I answered.

"Yes, a grand curative for mind or body. But I must travel, Doctor, for nature tells me I am hungry; and human rule has so arranged it that if I don't eat now at twelve o'clock, I must go hungry till six. Think over what I have said."

"Heavens!" I mentally ejaculated. "Think over what he has said—it is trying enough to *listen* patiently!" And, besides, here were the real torturing thoughts of everyday trouble, driving from my mind everything else, as the martins in spring drove the sparrows from their nests in the iron coping of the corner store's roof.

It was always this way when I was alone now, a tumultuous tableau; Minister Munro a blank; Teacher dead; Jean in a desert of misery; Robert, his body broken, at best a helpless cripple for life—a heavy price for the regeneration of his soul. Something in that thought staggered the idea of considering his redemption from drink as a touch of silver lining. The study in the Manse, the unholy odor of drug, his quarrel with Neil, the disappearance of the jade-handled dagger—these remembrances perched like birds of evil omen on the walls of the regeneration edifice, and I fell to wondering why Robert had not cleared up the mystery when it was thought he might die. It must be a dark something when he had not spoken then.

Bain had arranged for Doctor MacLean to come from York for the last service over little Teacher.

"It will be just in keeping with her gentle, Christian life for Doctor MacLean to word what her loss means to us, and draw our attention to the reward religion holds for such," he said.

The morning of the funeral the Memsahib said to me: "It seems cruel that Teacher could not be buried from the church she loved so well; she spoke of it toward the last."

"It doesn't matter much," I answered; "the real beautiful part, Teacher herself, has gone."

At two o'clock shutters hid the windows of the stores; the hammer that had rung upon an iron anvil was leaned against the forge; the smith stripped the leather apron from his waist, and in his home donned his Sunday suit of black. The village rested from toil and from barter and from play. The schoolroom, deserted, held only silent, solemn benches. The wooden sidewalk echoed to the sedate tread of men and women and children that marched, scarce speaking, to a little brick cottage that had for many years known the quick, nervous patter of Teacher's feet.

Within an acacia hedge the villagers waited.

Presently, actuated by transmitted impulse, they thronged into the cottage, pushing gently, silently, like sand drifting before a wave, until men stood shoulder to shoulder, a solid mass of human sympathy.

Doctor MacLean spoke gently of the loss that had brought all these friends of the dead woman together, asking the listeners not to make useless the glorious endeavor of the Christian life that had been so long with them an embodied call from God for better living. Then he offered up an earnest, pathetic prayer. When the gentle-faced minister rose

and, like an inspired poet of divinity, chose as a text for the Church's last tribute, reading from his Bible:

"'But Deborah, Rebecca's nurse, died, and she was buried beneath Bethel, under an oak, and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth.'"

I saw the Memsahib's eyes swim in tears, and all about me were white signals of unrestrainable sympathy and human feeling.

"Allon-bachuth means the Oak of Weeping," Doctor MacLean said, in his poet's voice, "and to-day we lay to rest our loved sister under the oak of our weeping hearts. Like Deborah, she was a nurse for the afflicted in spirit. All her life she nursed the weak in heart and the stricken in mind."

Mercifully Bain caught the Memsahib in his arms, and making a pretense that she walked, literally carried her out to the little lawn bordered by the acacias.

"I'm such a coward," the Memsahib sobbed.

"No, it's the brave quality of human sympathy," Bain objected. "It was just more than I could stand myself. You saved me from making a weak display."

When Doctor MacLean had ceased his tribute, the villagers passed in a long line to take a last look at the cold pale face, still sweet in death, that they had each loved—man, woman, and child.

Then from the little cottage that was like a great vase with its holding of white flowers, the long procession of carriages and farm wagons passed to the village cemetery in its grove of pines. Through their harp boughs the wind car-

ried a plaintive dirge to blend with the minister's soft voice as he read:

"'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.

"'For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.

"'As for man his days are as grass; as a flower of the field so he flourisheth.

"'For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.

"'Behold I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.

"'But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'"

As some beautiful dream is shattered to waking pain by the fall of a book, so I almost cried out in anguish, waked into dreary realism by the dull thud of gravel echoing on the coffin from the bottom of the grave. Indeed it was the last terrible rite of inexorable reality.

CHAPTER XVIII

DICK SWEENY was not a man to remain silent over what he had seen the night of the church fire. He repeated what he had told me of MacKillop's treacherous act. Donald Campbell, who had been holding the nozzle with Sweeny, confirmed the latter's story. But a careful canvass of the situation made it evident that the crime of attempted murder could not be proven against MacKillop in a court of justice. He could easily claim that he was fighting the fire back from Bain, and that the high pressure in the hose had caused the nozzle to swerve.

There was a tacit understanding that MacKillop would have to leave Iona. I saw the full extent of this one day when I chanced into the Plowshare tavern. I had gone there in quest of a man to spade the Memsahib's garden.

As I passed from the hall into a general lounging room that was next the bar, a falsetto voice, familiar, perhaps half an octave higher through environing inspiration, fell upon my ear. It was Sweeny's, and he was saying: "Well, b'ys, here's to the fire brigade, and the waterworks—though I'm not for much water in mine, I'll leave that fixin' to the landlord."

I knew as well as though I had seen it that the speaker winked diabolically down the avenue of grinning faces, that lined the bar.

"Here's to the fire brigade!" Sweeny continued; "and to the sandiest man in Iona, barrin' none, Malcolm Bain."

"By God! you're right there, Dick," some one in the line answered. "I've seen game men in my time—I see a chap get the V. C. in Africa last year for takin' a less chance than Bain took."

I heard the front door open and close, and turning my head saw MacKillop.

He entered the outer room, scanning its occupants furtively; his face, always vicious in its sneering uncertainty, now carried lines that were not alone of weariness or physical toil. I felt that he was an outcast wary of his fellows, and yet a cry in his heart for even casual companionship.

He took a hesitating step that carried him to where two men sat.

"How are you, Andy?" he greeted, holding out his hand; "how d'ye like farmin' out in Manitoba—have you just come back for a visit to the old place?"

I watched curiously for the result of this experiment. The man he addressed rose, and took the proffered hand, saying: "I'm not so bad— How's tricks with yourself, Archie? Manitoba's all right—I just got home last night."

"Will you take something, Andy?" MacKillop queried.

"I don't mind," the man replied.

Just as they reached the barroom door Sweeny's voice came shrilly, saying: "And, b'ys, here's eternal damnation to a treacherous murderer that hangin's too good fer."

MacKillop's face darkened; he hesitated for an instant,

then entered the room and walked up to the bar. The man next him put down his glass with half the liquor in it and drew away.

Sweeny, standing with his back to MacKillop, said: "B'ys, I'm agin lynch law, but there's times when it's a damn good thing."

He turned quickly at the sound of MacKillop's voice, who was saying to the bartender: "Here, Charlie, give us a drink."

The file of men faced about, and seeing the speaker, moved away. The barteider turned and busied himself dusting some bottles.

"*Charlie! I want a drink!*" MacKillop repeated.

The man at the bottles dusted in silence.

MacKillop picked up a glass and struck the oaken barrier sharply. Charlie faced about, a frown drawing his heavy black eyebrows together in a sullen look of defiance.

"You must be deaf," declared MacKillop. "Give us a drink—*d' you hear?*"

"Yes—I hear; but I won't serve you."

I saw Andy's lean, toil-conditioned head go up in combative rigidity. His grizzled red beard bristled in anger as he said: "Look here—damn your cheek!—am I an Injun that I'm refused a drink?"

There was no sound save the voices of this little group; the others stood in listening attitude, glorying in the stand Barkeeper Charlie had taken.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Black," the latter said; "you can have anything that's in the house—what'll you drink?"

"I'm drinkin' with Archie MacKillop," Black answered; "an' if he drinks, I drink; an' if he don't, I don't."

I admired the speaker's loyalty, and knew that, having been away, he was probably unaware of the feeling, even of the suspicion against his companion.

"If you don't serve me," declared MacKillop, "I'll break your license; where's the boss — where's MacGregor?"

"Here I am," a short, thick-set man answered, stepping forward.

"I'm refused a drink in this bar," MacKillop said angrily.

"Well, try some other place," MacGregor replied with disdain in his voice.

This quiet dispassionate answer roused a devil of fury in the other man; the words stung him deeper than angry oaths would have. His resentment turned on Sweeny—no doubt MacKillop had heard what the Irishman had said of Bain's accident.

His passion blinded him. The drink he had come in for, the bartender, the proprietor—everything was eliminated but the presence of the man he blamed as the author of his ostracism. He broke forth in a torrent of abuse.

"I know why you won't give me a drink, you whisky-slingin' swine! It's because of that Papist's lyin' tongue. He's set out to ruin me. I'm an outcast. That long-legged, red-mouthed mick has been tellin' about that I tried to do up Bain. . . . Stand back, you fellows, an' give me a show; if you don't, by Hell! as sure as God made little apples I'll cut your hearts out!"

"Here, you, be quiet," began MacGregor.

"Look out, Dick!" warned one of the others.

"Let him come! By hickory, I'm here!" Sweeny an-

swered, backing against the wall, and just missing a vicious blow that the enraged man, darting forward with stooped shoulders, aimed at his stomach.

Before Sweeny could swing his big fist something of elastic strength caught MacKillop, and drew him to the other end of the room. This power was Andy Black's long arm. Now he had dexterously shifted his position, and held by the chest the man who was half maniac.

The proprietor, too, had clutched an arm, and was saying: "You'll keep still, Archie, or I'll call the constable in a holy minute; and you'll go down to the county jail for this, or my name's not MacGregor."

When the man of violence was quieted a little, Black turned to Sweeny and the others, saying: "Don't make any mistake, you fellows, I'm standing at Archie's back."

"Faith, he'll need it if he comes at me again," declared Sweeny.

"Just hold your horses, Dick," advised Andy; "I'm not spoilin' for a fight, but I came in here to drink with Archie, an' I'm goin' to see him through his trouble if he's gettin' the worst of it. I just want to know the ins and outs of this. It's the first time in my life I was ever refused a drink, an' I want to know the reason."

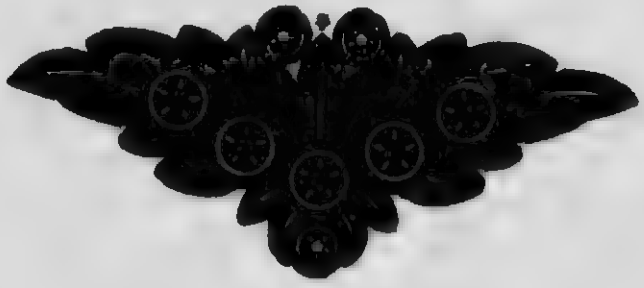
"You're shovin' your oar in, Black," retorted Sweeny, for he was angry; "I wouldn't poke another man's fire if I was you."

"I'm interested, ain't I?" Black queried crossly. "When Andy Black goes back on a chum just because there's a dozen against him you'll find pigs in the moon—do you understand that, Dick Sweeny? I want to get at the bottom of this."

MacGregor nudged the speaker, and together they left the bar.

Presently Black returned, and facing MacKillop, said: "I'm not wantin' a drink now. I'm thinkin' you'll be better away from here, man. You'd best go, MacKillop. I'd tell a lie if I said I was sorry for you."

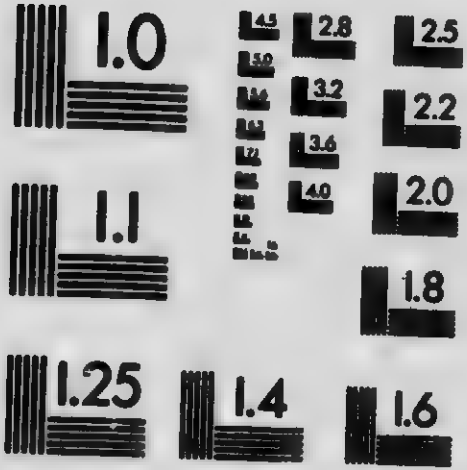
With a curse MacKillop turned and passed out to the street.





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CHAPTER XIX

THERE had been another consultation over Robert Craig—Doctor Colton coming from York for it.

While the boy had grown stronger, there was no evidence of improvement in the injured part, and Dr. Colton advised that he should be sent to Montreal where a famous French physician, Dr. Lupin, a specialist in hip and spine diseases, was temporarily practicing. Both Malcolm and I had volunteered to take Robert to Montreal, and Jean, half reluctantly, had consented to part with her brother.

The storm of tragic happenings that had swirled about our heads, leaving so much mental distress in its wake, seemed to have passed. Indeed, we were like the remaining inhabitants of a place devastated by a tornado, in an aftermath of apathetic desolation.

Craig was to be taken to Montreal Monday; and Sunday evening, sitting alone in my study, the Memsahib having gone to church, I was trying, by reading, to project my mind, esoterically, across seas from a retrospective contemplation of the village's unpleasant life problems. I struck fair across my domain, not taking any path, by just reaching to a shelf for as

many books as would come away in fingers stretched to an octave—leaving even the looking for suitability to the eyes in the finger tips. I could not well have gotten farther from the present provincial environment had I consulted a list, for I opened a gray-tinged book that carried on its cover the legend: "Croydon, The Teignmouth Public Library." Within was a date carrying me back a century; and the piquant chatter was of a hundred years still deeper in the annals of the past. A fine flavored, joyous, scintillant atmosphere, darting its rays of light through the murk of London fogs and chop-house smoke.

Colley Cibber defending his comedies against the scalpel of Pope's vicious dissecting—Cibber as the "Author" defending his work against Pope personified as Mr. Frankly. And again Pope at war with a doughtier knight, Addison, smarting under the older man's crushing, insincere patronage, painting this word-picture of an enemy-friend:

> "Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer;
> And, without sneering, teach the rest to sneer;
> Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike;
> Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike."

And across the pages of my book of the Croydon Library trooped the heavy Warburton, the merry Steele, and the literary mountebank, Mallet; the imperious Bolingbroke—domineering, cursing the memory of Pope over the printing of 1,500 copies of my lord's "Patriot King," but secretly angered because Pope had left the editing of his works to Warburton instead of His Lordship Bolingbroke. Touches of humor, as when Mallet, pompous in his self-sufficiency, com-

ing upon an anonymous new thing, "Essay on Man," dismissed it with a contemptuous fling at the author's lack of quality and knowledge, only to discover later that it was Pope's. And Cibber's epigrammatic verse upon the failure of his play, "Cæsar in Egypt," declaring in one line:

"'Twas ne'er in Cæsar's destiny to run."

And again when King Charles put the merry joke of the fishes upon the learned doctors of the Royal Society.

Wondering why Pope should lay down his pipes to twang upon the triangle of discord—plaster a festering leaf of his "Dunciad" over a wound in the back of some literary swashbuckler, when he might have piped to the stars, or echoed the travail of world-birth, led to the curious thought that these literary gods were very like the men of Iona in their crisscross state of savagery.

A knock at the door brushed it all away, I wishing a God-speed of relief.

Rising, I opened the door, and the hall light flickered the dark face of MacKillop into relief against the night background. I was surprised to see him, of all men, at the Hedge.

"I'd like to speak to you a minute, Doctor Cameron," he said, and in an indecision of reluctance and pity I swung the door wider as an invitation. He sidled in nervously, and I closed it behind him.

"I want to see Mrs. Munro, if I can," he said.

"I'm afraid you can't," I answered with brevity; "she is with her brother, and I'm sure she's very tired—perhaps lying down."

MacKillop twirled the hat he held in his hand deprecatingly; he was turning something over in his mind.

I waited.

"I know what it is, Dr. Cameron," he said; "I might as well be Lazarus——"

"Come in here," I invited, interrupting him, and leading the way into my study, closing the door behind us.

"What is it you want to see Mrs. Munro about?" I asked. "Under the circumstances this is my business, for here we seek to save her trouble—she has had enough."

"I can't tell you," MacKillop answered; "but I've just got to see her. God, man! is there no such thing as mercy, or humanity? Am I Cain, to be turned from every door?"

It was the appeal of a broken man, a man beyond evil intent. A sudden surmise came to me that he was here in the way of atonement; and was I to remain hard—should I grind the nether millstone?

"Wait," I said; "I will speak to Mr. Munro—sit here till I return."

I told Jean that MacKillop had come; adding that she had better see him. She came down the stairs, and I, showing her to the study, waited in the dining room. I could hear MacKillop's voice pleading with compelling intensity.

Presently Jean called me into the study, saying: "Mr. MacKillop wishes to see Robert. I think I shouldn't allow it, but I'll consent if you'll go up with him, Doctor—just for a minute."

MacKillop's face at once slipped into the distrustful look of a wary, hunted wolf. "I was wantin' to see him alone," he said sullenly.

"I can't permit it," Jean answered decisively; "you would only excite him."

"It's impossible," I confirmed.

"Well, if I can't, I can't; I'll go up with Doctor Cameron. I just got to see Bob, and say something that's on my mind. I'd better be dead than walkin' the floor with it night after night. Thank you, Mrs. Munro."

"Wait here a minute, please—I'll see if Robert is awake," Jean requested.

When she had gone MacKillop turned to me, saying: "I'm goin' to make a clean breast of the whole thing. I'm in hell—this village is a livin' hell—that's what it is. But I don't care that"—he snapped his fingers—"for the whole gang of them; they can do their dirtiest. Nor for Bain—curse him! But the poor boy, lyin' upstairs there, he got the worst of it—and it was never meant. As God's my judge, Dr. Cameron, I didn't know it was Craig that Bain had a hold of."

"Never mind—don't talk about it," I advised.

"I've got to—I'm driven to it; that's what I'm here for to-night. I've been hounded by the men of this hole as if I was Cain. If I was Dives in Hell beggin' for a drink of water I wouldn't get it from them. But I can stand that—curse them! When I had money some that turns their backs now was glad to help me drink it up—and they did."

"Drinking friends are not of much account when the pinch comes," I remarked.

"They'll turn on you like a dog when you're down; but it's only Bob that I'm worryin' over. We were chums, Doctor, and he was white clean through, if he did drink.

Man! do you think I'd want to hurt the lad I never had a cross word with in my life? We went to school together, and, though I'm ashamed to say it now, we got drunk together a hundred times."

"I hope you'll not go on like this upstairs, MacKillop."

"I won't—that's why I'm telling you. I've got to put it off my mind—I've got to tell some one—it's settin' me fair crazy; you won't split"—he put his hand on my arm, and his eyes, in which dissipation had mapped little rivers of blood and yellow ocher, looked at me from under heavy black brows like the eyes of a pleading dog; "give me your word, man to man, that, save you're asked in court, you'll never mention what you hear to-night."

"I give you my word—I'm sorry for you, MacKillop," I declared.

"That's the first kind word I've heard for days. I'm starvin' for somebody to say 'MacKillop' as they used to. And as God's my judge I never meant it against the boy, never. I saw Bain and my eyes just went hot with blood—I'd been drinkin'."

"How did it happen?" I asked.

"Me and Maloney was holdin' the hose, playin' the water on the floor, when all at once I felt a jerk—Maloney slipped. I could a held the nozzle off Bain, but I didn't. God forgive me, the chance come, and I took it. But I didn't know it was Bob; and Bain, the man I held the grudge against, got next to nothin', and the poor boy that I would have stood by got the worst of it. I heard that they were sendin' him to Montreal Monday, and they're sayin' that he'll never come back alive, and I've come to ask him to forgive me. He's the only one I care for; the village can go to hell!

Them that turns their backs on me—half of them, are praying hypocrites."

"You may come up now, please," Jean's voice sounded down the stairs.

"Mind, MacKillop," I abjured, "the boy is all gone to pieces in his nerves, and you mustn't get him excited."

I preceded the penitent. Twice I stopped and looked back, not hearing his footfall on the carpeted stair; each time he was three steps behind me. A nervous reluctance such as makes weak the limbs of a man mounting the scaffold was over MacKillop's heart.

There was a wan, tired smile of welcome on Robert's face as MacKillop hesitated just within the door; and then, at a touch from me on his arm he took the chair Jean had placed beside the bed.

A thin hand stretched toward MacKillop. He took it in his own and pressed it to his lips.

"I'm glad you've come, Archie," the boy said; "I'm glad to see you again."

MacKillop's black, shaggy head was bent down over Robert's hand, and in a jerky voice he said: "Bob, I didn't mean it—I didn't mean to hurt you, Bob—I didn't know you was there—before God, I didn't, Bob. If you'll say you forgive me you'll take a load off my mind. I'd rather die to-night than live a hundred years thinkin' you held this out against me. God in heaven! it's awful, Bob, to think that I brought this to you, and I didn't mean it."

MacKillop's plea for forgiveness was crude in sincerity, just a repetition of the boy's name and confession of the blackness of his treachery.

"I know, Archie, you wouldn't injure me willingly,"

Robert said, his voice weak, uttering the words wearily. "I forgive you—you didn't mean it."

"I didn't, Bob—I didn't! but I feel as bad as if I'd meant it. It ain't fair, Bob; you that never hurt nobody smashed up, and me the cause of it!"

"It was the drink, Archie; that's what did it all. It was that Devil that put me to sleep in the church, and made you hold the grudge against Bain."

The boy's head sank back on the pillow wearily, and MacKillop, holding his hand, sat silent. And the same silence was over all the room.

Presently Robert spoke again: "Archie, this smash isn't all bad, for I've conquered the drink-devil that caused it; will you do something for me—to make good?"

"Anything you can ask, Bob."

"Will you promise to cut out the whisky? You were a good man before it got the upper hand."

"*With God's help I will!*"

"You'll try hard, Archie?"

"*I will!* I'm goin' to make a new start; I'm goin' away to the States. I couldn't leave Iona till I'd asked you to forgive me, Bob; I just couldn't go away till I'd seen you."

"But there's something else before you go, Archie—you must do it for my sake. You must go to Bain and ask him to forgive you."

MacKillop sat silently pulling at his mustache, his eyes on the thin fingers he held in his hand. I could read the fierce turmoil that was in his heart. He hated Bain. It was a different thing from coming to ask forgiveness of the boy whom he had unwittingly injured. Besides, how would Bain take it; would he not turn upon him in scorn? I knew these

thoughts were passing through the man's mind. They found utterance when he said: "It wouldn't do, Bob; Bain wouldn't give in; he'd only take advantage of what I said and have me up."

"You're wrong, Archie; Bain is too much of a man for that. Come, Archie, *promise*."

The thin fingers pulled gently in the other's strong palm; they drew the reluctance out of MacKillop and he yielded.

"I owe you more than that, Bob; I'll do it, no matter how Bain takes it. I'm glad I came—God bless you, old man! You'll be gettin' better in Montreal—they'll cure you there. And if I come to any good myself, I'll come back to see you."

He carried the boy's fingers to his lips, then rose with a great sigh.

"Good-by, Archie; don't forget," Robert said.

As MacKillop passed Jean, standing by the door, he hesitated, turning awkwardly, and said: "I thank you, Mrs. Munro. I'm sorry for all the trouble and pain I've given you without meanin' to. I'm sorry; I'm goin' to stick to my promise to Bob."

Jean held out her hand to MacKillop. He took it hesitatingly, as a man feeling guilty of some crime might accept the sacrament.

MacKillop had crept in as a fugitive animal; he went out more erect, like a man who had escaped a death penalty.

The confessional! Like a stanch Protestant the confessional box to me savored of abhorrent mystery, a dangerous acquiring of power over humans; but here was confession itself a purifying fire, something to lift a depressing load from off a tired soul; how a man, taking thought with him-

self, could add to his stature, not alone morally, but, as in MacKillop's case, physically.

I could have sat at the shrine of the open grate hours with this psychological manifestation, but the Memsahib fluttered in, casting off, in a wonderfully petulant mood for her, particles of the dreary municipal-church atmosphere with the discarding of her wraps. With the unpinning of her hat it was: "I declare it makes one almost fancy that, after all, there is something of comfort in the mummery of the Catholic Church, and the ritual of the Anglicans."

"Dear me!" I exclaimed, for I could not have been more startled had the ceiling suddenly come down upon me.

"It's just disheartening!"—one arm out of her jacket—"the minister's squeaky voice was just a whine, beating petulantly against the barren walls of that hall; and for the choir to sing an anthem to a croupy little melodeon, tortured into revolt by a girl without any ear for music, from a dismal stage, is just a little too much even for me, and I think I'm patient enough."

"Yes, a church ought to be nice and comfortable," I commented maliciously; "the draughts in that hall are enough to give the regular sleepers their death of colds. And as for snoring—it's simply out of the question in that resonant chamber. What we want nowadays is a good comfortable religion." The Memsahib had shed the last of her irritation with her rubbers, and now, warmed by the grate fire, was ready for combat on the other side. "It's these tiny 'horn-pricks that stand us convicted of revolt at the first crying of the cock," I continued, shoving a hassock beneath her little feet.

"Nobody's in revolt," she objected.

"Half the congregation is now, I'll venture," I contended, "as three parts of it was when Neil Munro sat them on the uneasy bench of their own sinfulness. Is it to be wondered, then, that Jean, tried as she has been, is in full secession?"

"Jean is not in rebellion against God; she is only puzzled to a point of questioning; and that generally leads to stronger allegiance in the end. No one can honestly, seriously face the glorious subject of God's omnipotence and power without finally being convinced that it is the only wise guiding force for humanity. As you say, husband, she has been tried, and to a greater extent than either of us know. There is some depth to this mystery more terrible than we imagine, I fear. Both she and Robert carry something on their minds that no suffering, no desolation of present misery brings them to reveal. But her nature is beautiful, and when it is all past we'll know how extraordinarily beautiful it is, and we'll discover that she is a real Christian at heart."

"Even Robert's character is much finer than I thought it—I saw beneath the surface to-night," I added; "MacKillop has been here—he came to ask the boy's forgiveness."

The Memsahib could only remain silent in her astonishment, and I related what had occurred.

"It is just marvelous," she said, "how our life here has been drawn out of its simple sweetness into all this tragic living, with its different phases of crime and devotion and repentance. I can almost hear the wings of the Death Angel fluttering about the place where before the rustle of the maple leaves in summer, or the drive of snow against the window in winter, was all we heard. I've always maintained that no man is beyond human feeling."

"Yes, MacKillop certainly was pretty bad. It's like that song you sing:

"'As gold must be tried by fire,
So a heart must be tried by pain.'

And the trying of the human heart gives the most unlooked-for results. Here was a man fair prototype of the Fallen Angel, and to-night, haunted by remorse at having injured a boy whom he evidently was capable of holding regard for, he comes, humbling himself in confessional, to crave forgiveness. No doubt MacKillop was made sane by the retributive justice which the villagers so unsparingly applied. And we also see Robert's character with the poison ivy all burned away in the fire, standing clear and beautiful, like a healthy young tree. On the other hand Jean, of whom one should expect just this condition of mind, is possessed of dangerous questionings."

The Memsahib laid her hand on my arm in a gentle emphasis as she said earnestly: "Just as MacKillop and Robert have had light thrust into their darkened lives, so will Jean. God is sending her a little saviour. God's ways are mysterious, simply because they are too great for our weak understanding. He and He alone can brighten Jean's life, and answer her questionings."

CHAPTER XX

WE had all worried considerably over the going of Craig—I could feel a sympathetic wrench in my back every time I thought of moving the boy. But practical, methodical Bain had oiled all the wheels. A stretcher had been provided, and strong-armed men to carry Robert to the train. The terrible trial the parting would be to Jean was lessened by the physical ease with which the removal was accomplished.

We waited in Montreal for Dr. Lupin's diagnosis of Robert's case. The doctor sent us away with a slight hope, which we enlarged upon for Jean's benefit—trying to assume the debonair manner of schoolboys home for a holiday.

Immediately most wonderful letters commenced to arrive from Robert's nurse, Eloise. They contained an astounding knowledge of the pathology of spine diseases, especially of Robert's case. Such roseate pictures of convalescence were rendered that I should not have been surprised to have seen Robert walk in, fit and well, any day.

When I spoke of these letters to Bain, remarking upon the extraordinary interest Eloise took in the case, giving up a considerable portion of her time to this letter writing,

he smiled grimly, saying: "Yes, Mam'selle is keeping to her bargain honestly enough. I was a little uneasy, for I haven't great faith in the French."

"What bargain?" I asked.

"Mam'selle has five dollars a week for the clerkship; I left the money with a friend to give her. I was thinking that it would help Jean bear up. It's the fretting over trouble and pain that is worse than the thing itself. It's difficult for a man with much imagination to be brave."

"But Eloise is rather overdoing it, I'm afraid," I objected. "What if a black letter of despair were suddenly to come to Jean—the shock would be terrible."

"I just thought of that when I was arranging this, and I get a more reliable letter myself from Mam'selle. So far there's no very great difference in the correspondence, I think. Perhaps the nurse is running a few minutes ahead of time in her letters to Jean, but Robert is holding his own. Dr. Lupin has fine hopes."

"Does he think Robert will get well and strong again?"

"I think not—not strong; he'll be a cripple for life; but at that he'll be a better man than as he was—strong of limb but wrecked in mind."

As Malcolm walked away from me after this conversation, I was conscious of the magnetic power a beautiful mentality has over a person brought within its sphere of influence, even changing one's perspective of the physical tabernacle of that mentality.

Once I had thought Bain awkward in his movements, of too strong a physical contour; now I saw a tigerish certainty of tread in his walk—shorter in his stride than a loose-jointed unmuscular man of his height; his great weight

seemed to carry rather on his toes than on his heel, as a prize-fighter walks; his head, outlined against the yellow evening sky, was statuesque. A woman, sitting where I was, and in love with this gentle gladiator, could have pictured him as a Scandinavian hero-god, Odin perhaps. Here was that simple, generous thought of his about the letters. And, going down in the train, Robert had confided to me that MacKillop had kept his promise and gone to Bain, and Malcolm had not only forgiven, but had given him money to go away with for a fresh start in life.

These days the village was like a boat lying in the trough of the sea, floundering sullenly as though almost waterlogged; the only movement of the waters a long ground swell, the sluggish aftermath of the storm that had passed.

By a process of elimination, a certain quietude of comment had supervened; the busy clatter of envious tongues had almost stilled. MacKillop had gone, Robert was away, and Minister Munro was as if he had ceased to exist. Jean was scarcely seen of the villagers now.

They were the audience to offer a little of approval and a great deal of condemnation, but the stage was almost devoid of actors, and so they turned to material things at hand.

In truth the church people now wrangled among themselves over a tangible something, a something that everybody understood thoroughly, from MacKay down to the printer's devil on the village paper. This something was the rebuilding of the kirk. There were workmen, carpenters, masons, painters at work, but they were there to be advised, to be corrected, to be found fault with. The villagers hurried from their daily toil to their homes in the evening, released by the clanging town bell, bolted their

suppers, and dashed back to the grassed lawn about the kirk to explain to each other just where the work of reconstruction was faulty. It was chiefly matters of detail that produc the fiercest wrangles. The color scheme for the interio entirely foreign to everyone's conception, naturally evoked the deepest interest. In a way each member of the congregation, knowing his neighbor's weakness in this affair of art, felt safe in taking a strong position on the subject.

The painter himself was entirely ignored. It was thought that years of brushing at secular edifices, such as barns, fences, and cottages, must have entirely eliminated his artistic perceptions. Figuratively he was brushed to one side. For a week the citizens dabbled in color—running the whole gamut of pigments, from the three primaries out through the secondaries, and along the radiating ramifications of the tertiaries. Shades and tones that had never seen the light before, even among the ambitious students of Gérôme, or the exuberant colorists who chased the phantom of Monet's juxtaposition of wild hues, now appeared upon the interior walls of the kirk, brushed there by the patient painter at the instigation of their inventors. Within, the church looked like a piebald horse, a zebra, a very drunken Alhambra, a Taj Mahal on which the colors had run.

Something was sure to come of it all, so they squabbled with avidity; while we of the Hedge sat in rejoicing at their harmless occupation.

Nobody knew just how it had occurred, but the Biblical inscription, trailing its letters along the arch of the apse, went all awry. It should have read:

"Blessed be Jehovah, Israel's God,"

but something of a juggling nature had occurred in the limning of the sentiment. It was as though a printer's devil, having the line to set up, had used Roman and Arabic characters indiscriminately, with a dash of Old English and a sprinkling of German. God's name stood out rather prominently, and that is all that could be said in its favor. Jehovah certainly read Jonah, or Godown, or a vivid fancy might have even pictured it as Golly. The letters had gone on a spree; they were like a file of bluejackets of different nationalities, very full, coming down a main street arm in arm. They leaned groggily up against each other where they should have dressed in open order; and they turned away in disdain where their natural condition should have been one of affinity.

Bain had an idea, confided to me, that the painter, tired of the many interferences, had deliberately painted them a text against the sin of meddling. Malcolm maintained that the line carried the sign manual of every elder in the church; that each groggy letter was meant as a protest to each worthy's officiousness.

Nothing could escape the interested Scots. The furnace pipe running the full length of the basement with true Celtic economy of heat was not allowed to pursue its peaceful career unchallenged; it became a huge serpent of insidious discord. Varnish was the medium of contention. MacKay was strong on varnishes, so was the Undertaker; and Willie Watson had had great experiences in the same line. But MacKay brought his argument to bear on the subject in the way of a two-gallon can of his favorite adhesive.

"There!" said he, planking the can emphatically in front of the painter, "gi'e it a coat o' that, an' if anyone

objects gi'e it another. I ha'e stovepipes in my house for twelve years coated with that preparation, and the iron's all rusted awa', but the pipes still stand gude as ever—just the varnish, mind you, not a trace o' the original iron."

It was a strong testimony, likewise the varnish was to hand, so on it went. MacKay surveyed the glistening pipe with fatherly pride, saying: "For many a year I've had the stink in my nostrils o' the varnish Willie Watson glued they pipes wi'. Man alive! he near smothered Tommy the sexton last fall when the fire was first started. I'll take my religion wi'out smells if I can manage it."

So they builded away at the kirk, while we at the Hedge lay becalmed in the shadow of the Albatross.

The first evening after Robert's going away Jean had indulged in a terrible fit of despondency; she had wept herself into a state of exhaustion. Luckily sleep, erratic agent of solace, had come, carrying on its wings Nirvana, and in the morning hope had touched her soul with courage.

Then for a time the letters from Nurse Eloise had carried Jean along with their interest.

We never spoke of Munro now; there was no verbal admission that he was dead—we just waited in silence.

The summer, dying gloriously, seemed to drag the earth with it to some huge grave; the Autumn air carried a sense of dissolution; the earth lay in restful sleep, like a Buddhist priest on a funeral pyre, dressed in robes of tawny gold awaiting a change. The spirit of transition that murked the atmosphere breathed into our hearts, and I saw that Jean, out of the sheer emptiness of a life that held only a desolating silence, was growing morbidly nervous.

"We must do something," I said to the Memsahib; "there must be some break in this monotony. Jean is like a fretful child that needs a watch held to its ear, or a clattering toy in its hand. Something in this way—we must devise a change, even for a day."

At once the Memsahib threw a hazard, threw it with eyes shut, not knowing the many sixes that rolled from the box. "We'll have Molly out from York, and drive up to see Cousin Beth at Valleyford. The drive will do Jean good, and the sight of Beth in her brave little life is enough to shame one into courage."

"The very thing," I answered. To me Beth was a dream-lady. I knew her as well; all about her plucky fight against adversity, all about her three boys and Matthew, who was never Mister Anybody, but just Cousin Beth's husband. And yet I had never seen the little body. The sixteen-mile drive to Valleyford was one we were always on the point of taking, but something always interposed—bad roads, or storms, or lame horses—always something.

So Molly, who was our children's Auntie, was got out from York, and the next morning the Memsahib and Jean and Auntie and myself started, and, at the last minute, we took Kippie, just as when one is all dressed up in his best he pins a rosebud on the lapel of his coat.

Tacitly each one of us three, who were consoling servitors to Jean, had determined to make the most of the drive; and Nature, knowing of our intent, had draped the gnarled oaks and spreading maples and mighty elms with Titanic design and rainbow coloring.

Keewatin the Bowman had shot his arrows, which are the North Wind, frost-pointed, into the heart of the forest,

and the maple leaves, splashed with its blood, were like red letters of vengeance crying out against their death.

All that was my fancy, and Jean, interested, said it was very beautiful.

Then the Memsahib—the forest-lined road taking her back to the Burma jungles—found yellow-robed priests, *phoongyis*, in the tawny-leaved oaks, oriental Druids; and Molly declared that the dead leaves fluttering to earth like stricken birds were golden sovereigns.

To Jean the hills in the distance were on fire. That also was the blood-red stretch of crimson maples; and about and over this imaginative conflagration hung the blue haze of autumn that was like a lacework of smoke.

We topped one hill but to see another; valley succeeded valley, as though in prehistoric times rivers had raced side by side with the eroding continuance of a million years.

To me it was an awakening. Down in the village, a place of great worth, the tillers of the soil coming to my door with butter and eggs and things of barter were men akin to peddlers; but here, where broad acres stretched forth in majesty to the sky line, and herds rose up from their grassy couch to gaze upon us with eyes of equality, I, transformed, became of the kin of the packman, seeing the master of these lands of production a monarch reigning in his own right, his huge barn a fortress stored with ammunition for the battle of life; his dwelling a feudal castle with none to cross the drawbridge but at the pleasure of its lord.

Presently the Memsahib discovered a border of flowers running the length of two hundred acres of land. The flowers were lichens and mosses that had homed for thirty years

upon the weathered fence. Gentle gray greens and flesh pink and embossed silver—altogether beautiful was the intricate witchery of this monogram which was Time's initials engraved upon the boards.

Youth, five years young, sitting astride Kippie's shoulders, touched with the belladonna of ecstasy her big wondering eyes till they glittered, dark-blue sapphires of delight. Youth's deft pencil curved imaginative lines of beauty about a ewe-necked, broken-kneed, sway-backed old mare in a clover pasture till the little lady exclaimed with joy, "See the lovely colt!"

I'm sure that Jean sighed; and I cried exultantly, "A kingdom for such rose-tinted glasses!"

The old sheep were lambs, and a dismal pirate of a cowbird a robin, to Kippie.

Slowly we jogged up Silver Brook hill a full mile, and at the top such a panoramic view of hazed valleys and golden-haired hills stretched away that the very horses stopped in admiration. Perhaps in reality they were a little blown, but I allowed them to linger, for there, at the cost of nothing, we had come into the possession of a Turner worth a prince's ransom, or was it a Poussin, or a Claude? Browns, transparent and luminous, pearly grays that softened the rude outline of majestic oaks, and, twining in and out through the olive green of a pine-clothed valley, was the glittering thread of Silver Brook. Away to the right, nestling in the golden-brown valley, was a hamlet, its red-brick hostelry and church, dim bloodstones.

"It is beautiful!" Jean exclaimed. I could hear her drinking in great drafts of the crisp autumn air, that with unseen fingers had stolen myrrh and frankincense from the

resinous pines and the browning buds of the cedar for the anointing of our lungs and the adoration of our souls.

"See yon little speck!" I cried, pointing to the hamlet.

"That's Silvertown," Jean said.

"Strenuous Scotchmen built that place," I added; "great men they are in this section; great men among men. And yet it is but a pinhead—God made all the rest."

At the bottom of the hill we dipped into a leaf-roofed tunnel, and the Memsahib, touching my arm, said: "There's the watering trough; let the horses have a drink."

From a little pool dappled with curly watercress crystal spring water purled and rippled to a great hollow wooden log beside the road. Stately rushes nodded their brown heads over the cress, and their fairy-winged seeds were now speeding away to foreign lands, borne on the autumn wind. A little deeper in the grotto, where the tiny stream sang over green-mossed rocks, grew ferns almost indefinite in the delicate tracery of their sepia fronds.

When I threw loose the checkreins, the horses thrust their muzzles into the beaded champagnelike water, nostril deep.

We had come leisurely—haste, servantlike, waiting upon content—among Earth's tapestries we had loitered, so the horses were not too hot to drink. I watched huge balls chase each other down their stretching throats, and soon, with snorting sighs of content, the happy topers shoved back from the bar.

The Memsahib called down to me as I drew again the check: "If men were as wise as horses——"

"They are in some things," I interrupted.

"When horses have had enough to drink they stop," she said; "but men are not so wise."

"The horses are lacking in development," I objected. "Baldy, there, if he knew enough to say to Jack, 'Here's to you, Jack,' and the other understood, I've no doubt they'd both drink too much for their good."

It was a revamped Scotch story I had made use of to refute the Memsahib; but Molly's laugh brought another from Jean, and I felt that we were getting on nicely.

And so through the land beautiful, gypsies by its humbling force, we came to Cousin Beth's village.

Valleyford stands like a meditative stork upon one leg, its other limb (in truth it never had one) tucked away out of sight; and in the missing limb's place are fields of wheat stubble, and purple-furrowed land showing the brown withered foliage of potatoes that nestle in its bosom. For a mile on our right was the urban manifestation of men living shoulder to shoulder, and to our left the suburban solemnity of fecund farm lands.

"In the name of all grotesque survey, what happened this place in its babyhood?" I asked. "It's like half a shirt, it's like a sleigh with one runner, it's like half a turkey for a Christmas dinner."

"It was Rory MacDonald that made the village travel so far," explained Molly. "'The others would not build the kirk on the spot he picked out, so he just sat down, dourlike, vowing that he'd 'Gie them the full o' their ain way—he'd mak' them foot it a lang road tae worship.' It's all his land on the left, and he wouldn't sell an acre."

"Worthy descendant of Bruce of the Spider story," I

remarked. "Here's tae you, MacDonald, and your wee bit persistence."

"He was .... obstinate old Scot," the Memsahib declared.

Jean looked at me, an indulgent smile on her lips, for the Memsahib was not of our Highland commonalty.

Just beyond the potato patch a small broken-backed log-house stared vacantly at us through sashless windows. In that shack the MacDonald had lived and had his being when he cleared the heavy forest from his first acre of tillable soil.

Pink-topped beets and huge postlike mangels, their red shoulders thrust above the soil, leered through a rail fence at the trim brick house of the banker across the thoroughfare that was half country road and half village street. From opposite the very gate of the tall-spired kirk a lane dove into the MacDonald domain, and thirty yards along its hedged side was a farm mansion, angular, square, imposing in its uncompromising architecture.

I could imagine the MacDonald issuing from the front door each Sabbath morning, a grim smile lighting up his strong features as he saw, up and down the roadway, as far as the eye could stretch either way, the villagers, in their Sunday best, tramping to the kirk that he could have plumped a stone into from his own veranda. Indeed he might have milked his cows in the barnyard each Sabbath evening to the music of the organ had he so wished.

"There she is, bless her heart!" cried Molly; and to the right I saw the slender figure of a woman proffering the invitation of an open gate, in front of a low-walled cottage, the shingles of its roof spaced off into tiny squares,

like a checkerboard, by bright green moss that rooted in the cracks.

As I swayed the carriage to the walk Beth came to a wheel, and, reaching my hand, said: "And *you* came, Doctor—this is almost too much happiness for one day."

There was a touch of unconscious drama in the generous thought, as though unstinted joy must bring an aftermath of calamity. I looked curiously at Beth as my companions tumbled rapturously into her arms. She was small and slender.

Matthew was working in the shop, Beth said; would I drive there and he would see to the horses. I scanned Matthew's face, and considered him curiously as something that affected Beth's life—abstractly interesting.

Matthew sighed when he put on his coat, and, I fancied, looked regretfully at the unfinished carriage wheel over which he had bent his back in toil.

To the hostler of the hotel we made over the horses. As we turned the corner a great angular man issued from the bar and solemnly asked, "Are you no' weel the day, Jarvis?"

"I'm fairly well," Matthew answered meekly.

"I'm glad o' that—I was fearin' when I see you wi' your coat on."

Beth's husband explained nothing, and we took our way along the board sidewalk that was the very outskirts of the city, the rebuking of civilization against the grassed border of the dour MacDonald's holding.

Two men stood waiting our approach, gazing with fixed interest upon my companion.

"What's up, Matt?" one of them asked, as—the nar-

row walk blocked by their sturdy frames—we were brought to a halt.

"Nothing," Jarvis answered quite simply, showing neither annoyance nor interest in the query.

"I'm glad o' that. Dugald, here, when he see it was you wi' your coat on jumped tae the conclusion that Mistress Jarvis wad be ailin' agen, an' your friend was a dochter fra York, perhaps."

Now, thought I, Jarvis must needs explain about himself and who I am. But the quiet little man had gentle ways of reticence.

"The missus is doing finely, thank you," he answered; and on the very edge of the sidewalk, skirting the immovable promontory of the two, we swung on our way again.

Three times before we reached the little cottage Matthew was questioned as to why, in working hours, he donned a coat and idled on the streets. Indirectly I was becoming acquainted with Beth's husband.

"Will you come into the parlor?" Jarvis invited, as with modest courtesy he threw open a door to the right, and stepped back for me to pass.

The room was small and square, and brushed clean to the polish of a lacquer box. Simple mottoes hung upon the walls against a wondrous intricacy of flower-decorated paper; "Walk in Love," "God is My Shepherd"—worked in many-colored worsted. "God Bless Our Home" looked at me from over a clock mantel.

"Perhaps you'd rather smoke?" Jarvis suggested. "I generally take my pipe to the kitchen," he added hesitatingly. "Beth is much set against tobacco smoke in the curtains; but they are busy now over the dinner, and if you'd like a pipe

I'll shut the door and open the window, and I don't think she'll know. You'd not need to mind anyway," he added, "you'll be away."

There was resignation and, I'm sure, hidden humor in the little man's speech.

But I didn't wish to smoke, and through the open doors came drifting across the narrow hall a clatter of china as the four women bustled from dining room to kitchen. I heard Molly's voice saying: "Never mind, Beth, the boys will be just as well in the city as though they were here with you."

Beth in the little kitchen must have expressed a fear, for the Memsahib said: "They are such steady boys, Beth; they'll be all right—you'll see!"

A little pause, and again the Memsahib's voice: "So lonesome? I know; but that will wear off—oh, now, Beth, you silly child!"

Then Jean, her rich, soft voice in gentle chiding: "You poor dear, Beth—you are just tired out. Come and sit here beside me. There, now, don't cry! You are lonesome! It is so dreary! Of course it is; I know how—" Jean's voice stopped abruptly.

"I guess I'll go and bring in some wood for the missus," Matthew said, rising. "Here's the album if you like to look at pictures. I'll be back in a minute."

Just once I heard a little sob from the dining room across the hall, and the slow, solemn voice of a man, and I knew that Matthew had deceived me—that he was not bringing in wood at all.

Presently he came back, saying: "Seeing the girls again has sort of upset the missus a bit. She's powerful down-

spirited since Jimmie went away. The three of them have gone now; Jimmie went a month ago."

Presently Beth's voice sounded at our very door: "You must be starved, you poor old dears! But dinner is on the table at last."

Beth slipped her hand through my arm, and we marched into the little dining room that seemed to bulge with the presence of so many grown-ups.

At the farther end of the table from Beth, Matthew bowed his head behind a little hillock of roast beef till his gray wisps of thin, dry hair peeped from either side of it like whiskers on a fat-faced Indian.

"Lord for all thy bountiful gifts we thank thee," Matthew said meekly; and then to the soft rustle of lifted napkins he piped a shrill accompaniment on a steel with a carving knife.

And such a sauce there was to the meat! the wonderful necromancy of Molly's optimistic future for Beth and Matthew when the boys presently became rich, as they surely would in the great city.

"It's pretty hard to make money these times," Matthew sighed.

But Molly scoffed at the idea. Herbert was sure to get on; he was starting in the way—had the very same billet in the Canadian Pacific Railway that the now President of that line had had when he was a boy.

Beth smiled at this optimistic picture, and, nodding to me, said: "You are sitting in Herbert's place—that's where he always sat, at that corner. Jimmie used to sit here beside me. But Herbie writes that he's got very long hours, Molly."

"Just the thing for a boy; it keeps him out of—" Molly hesitated to even hint at the temptations of the city—"it keeps him from getting lonesome. I saw him the other day, and he's growing to be *such* a man; you wouldn't know him, Matthew."

Beth's face softened to exquisite beauty; she reached over and patted the consoler on the arm.

"The little Mother! eh, Molly? you always got that name, didn't you?"

"I'll look after Herbie, Beth," Molly comforted; "he'll soon get promotion, then he'll have shorter hours."

"In my time," interrupted Matthew meekly, "we never looked for shorter hours—it was a job we were anxious about."

Though we had started with a plain roast, and our hostess was a desolate little mother deprived of her boys, before we had finished it was an uproarious banquet; the teacups clinked like goblets charged with rare wine. We two men of advanced years were rollicking boys that laughed at the pranks of four school girls. Molly, or some one, had lighted Aladdin's lamp, and we walked by its light in the future. The boys were all rich; Matthew had sold his little shop; they had rented the cottage—they'd never sell that, never!—and they were all living in the city. Matthew was in a large way of business, a great carriage shop. And it was wonderful how cheaply they could live in the city, being altogether in one family—that was, of course, before they had become so very wealthy.

When we had finished the banquet, carried to dizzy heights by Molly's fancy, I am sure Beth proposed that we throw the dishes out of the window instead of bothering to wash them.

Once in the way of apology Beth said: "It's dreadful to be alone when one has had lovers about one all one's life——"

"Where do I come in?" Matthew interrupted with a neutral smile; "I haven't run away yet."

Apprehensively I looked at Jean. Her eyes met mine, and a flush swept across her forehead, leaving it like a snow mountain from which the sunlight has been clouded.

"There!" cried the Memsahib in distress; "I have spilled my tea upon your clean tablecloth, Beth." I knew she had sacrificed the linen to the occasion.

But Beth, with her husband's challenge in mind, oblivious of its attendant bearing, answered: "I've got the old man, of course; but you girls can't understand how dreadful it is to have your little men go out like birds from the nest—Molly here hasn't any, and you, Memsahib, have all yours with you yet; and—" Then she stopped. Her confusion was so great that providentially her eyes remained on the table, as though fascinated by the Memsahib's little tea lake.

Psychologically I realized how sorrow makes one selfishly introspective, and also I knew how remorse had seized upon gentle Beth.

But Jean got us out of our difficulty by saying: "I suspect Matthew is secretly pleased over it all; I am sure he has been quite an outcast with those big boys taking up all the mother's love."

But, after all, the dishes were not thrown from the window; they were soon gleaming like pearls on the shelves of a cabinet, a sample of Matthew's handicraft.

Jean and Beth were sitting in a corner, the latter's hand

on Jean's knee. I could see a letter holding their attention, and knew it was one of Nurse Eloise's.

"That *does* read encouraging, doesn't it?" Beth was saying. "I declare, in those big hospitals they'll take a human being nowadays and patch him up just like Matthew does a wagon—some new spokes in a wheel, a bolt here and a bolt there, paint it all up, and, gracious! it looks just like new. And even if Robert were unable to walk—as good as ever, I mean—he'll still have his glorious voice; and, as you say, Jean, *now*—I mean with all the little foolishness passed—you'll be so happy together."

Wondrous epistle! Perhaps Fate, so compromised by all this optimistic promise, might be inclined to fulfill.

At Matthew's suggestion we two went for a stroll along the forehead of the lopsided town.

I think the pioneer questioners of the morning had leavened the whole village with their curiosity.

"I wonder what's happened?" my companion said, nodding toward many little knots of people; "there seems a great stir in the village." And when we had walked past two houses, he added: "Must have been a team run away—I wonder if anybody is hurt?" Buried in this thought, quite by chance, Matthew stole a march on the first villager who waylaid us.

"What's up, Donald?" he asked.

The man stared; the same question had been on the tip of his own tongue.

"Aye, I was just wondering. Have the boys come home—have they made rich already in the city?"

"What made you think they were back, man?"

"Seein' you walkin' round in the middle of the week with your hands in the pockets of your Sunday pants."

Then I noticed, for the first time, that Beth's husband had changed his suit.

"I'm not much for having them in anybody else's pocket," Jarvis answered dryly. His retort filled me with passionate joy; I was coming to know Beth's husband.

"Yon's a great card, coming in the buggy," Matthew said to me as we walked on. "He's a rich farmer, old John MacBean. They're all rich about here—the farmers." The last word was sighed. However, the rich MacBean was also curious.

"Aye, Jarvis, she's a fine day. Had you much insurance on the shop?"

"Quite a bit."

"You'll never get it; the insurance companies'll law you out of it. Is yon your brither?" MacBean was leaning over the dashboard in my direction, as though he would stretch his big red-haired paw and pull me to the seat at his side.

"You're a bit forward, MacBean."

In astonishment I heard Matthew's voice, its combative tones seemed as stiff as a new garment on him. But almost immediately he added: "It's my fault, MacBean—I'll introduce you. This is the gentleman that wrote the books on Canada—you must have read some of them—Doctor Cameron."

"Was it in the *Globe*?" MacBean asked, eyeing me curiously.

"No, I haven't the honor of writing for the *Globe*," I answered stiffly. The *Globe* was a York daily paper.

"Oh, you're on the other side—a Tory, eh? Well, I've no' read ony o' your writin's in that case."

I'm sure he laughed in Gaelic as he drove away; it was a harsh, barbarous cackle.

It was night when we started for home. The long street was like a river that carried on its left bank the green and red jewels of a lighted city, and on its right the shadowy edge of silent moorland. The swinging tavern sign creaked on its iron hinges, pushed fretfully by the autumn wind.

The jocund face in the moon tipped groggily, rakishly to one side, leered at us as we topped the last hill; and for a mile the silver thread of the graveled road lay like a pearl necklace on the breast of earth. Afar, on the outer edge of the world, twinkled lights.

"Home," half whispered Jean at my side, "how cheery the lights look. I've had such a lovely day. If one could but glide down this long hill, with home waiting at the foot of it, for ever and ever!"

But presently we were at the Hedge. The wheels had hardly ceased to crunch the roadway when a shaft of light burst from the door, and, pellmell, tumbled forth children and dog in vociferous welcome; and silhouetted in the square opening was the sturdy form of Sarah.

"A great soul panacea to-day," I whispered to the Memsahib, as Jean slipped up the stairway to take off her wraps.

I got the tribute of a kiss in answer, as though it had been all my doing—I, who had but driven the horses.

CHAPTER XXI

WE now put on the storm doors at the Hedge, the actual pine-wood barrier against "chill November's surly blast," and in fancy we hung a mental shield against all outdoor solace—the lawn, the hammock, the basking in the sunlight, and the children's picnics at West Branch.

The farewell ceremony to these joys of summer had been a Brahmanical rite, a grand cremation of dead leaves.

The maples lining both sides of the street had gone from deep green to crimson, and from crimson to burnt gold, and then, whispering in fear and trembling at the harsh call of the north wind, the leaves had showered the earth in a blizzard of great golden snowflakes, scurrying up and down the street like frightened sheep.

Fronting the hand gate grew a maple patriarch that always shed the first drop of blood in the autumn dying; that unfurled the earliest red banner of leaf nudation, and always from the same small limb. The children had come to look, perhaps with apprehension, perhaps with eagerness, for this scarlet letter that spelled "return to school," for its appearance was coincident with the close of the summer holidays.

When I passed the word that it was the time of annual bonfires, the children answered with yells of delight, and, armed with rake and broom, gathered the rustling leaves into little mounds like beaver lodges. And soon the village lay draped in blue smoke, and the perfume of it brought inward lamentation for the dead summer. And it was like mimic warfare, for Grandma Murdoch's horse-chestnut trees had showered to earth the glossy brown nuts, and these, gathered with the leaves, burst with detonations as of musketry.

But at last there were just the blackened rings of ashed leaves, and against the gray canvas of the autumn sky sepia-sketched trees standing asleep.

In a crotch of one maple was a deserted summer cottage, closed for the season—The Honorable Robin Redbreast's northern villa.

For years the same couple of thrifty robins had homed with us, and once in a mood of verse I had clutched at the skirts of the coy, treacherous muse—only to break down halfway on my journey. Perhaps I had attempted too much, or had been overthrown by the incongruity of my tactics, for I had harnessed Mrs. Redbreast and Mrs. Gillis to the same chariot of thought. I had started off fairly bravely with:

"'As I rub at my tub in the shadow of the tree,
I listen to the song that the robin sings to me;
It is sweet, sweet, sweet,
Where the sky and meadow meet,
And the daisies flood the valley like a sea.

"'The robin with the russet where 'twas cherry red before,
Has built her nest for ages in the tree above my door;
It is spring, spring, spring,
That's the message that I bring,
And —— ——— —— —'"

Alas! I never could get beyond this—never find the elusive line of completion. It was like the mislaid fifth finger of a hand; like a blown-up fort of the Cinque Ports.

But if the line did not come the robins did, not caring a whit about my muse so long as the Memsahib's garden was like the lid of a pepper box from the boring of angle-worms.

Like the robins we figuratively took wing to the southern warmth of indoors; like beavers we passed to the inner lodge; as disciples of Zoroaster to worship at the grate-fire shrine, and dull our ears to hoarse Winter's knock.

Life in the village was coming to a time of lull in all things. The church was nearing completion; there were few things left in its construction to wrangle over.

One day I carried home a letter to Jean, addressed in the upstanding attenuated characters I had come to know as Nurse Eloise's peculiarity.

I had barely turned on my heel after the morning's greeting, when Jean, who always opened the Nurse's letters with feverish haste, called to me to come quickly.

Startled, knowing that it was something of the letter, yet I noted with acute consciousness that it was not a cry of despair; her voice rang with the joyous clang of hope.

Jean's big black eyes blazed in a glorious illumination. She thrust the letter into my hand, crying: "Read that,

Doctor. My God! I can hardly trust my own eyes. Read it, and tell me that I am not the victim of some strange fancy!"

Read the letter? Heavens! I could only filter its Gallic promiscuously through the rigid mesh of an Anglo-Celtic sieve. It had been dictated by Robert and written by Mam'selle Eloise; the dogmatic assertions of a Celt treated, modified, distorted by the vivacious fancy of a parenthetically inclined Frenchwoman.

Three readings of the epistle developed two distinct convictions. Robert had seen Neil Munro standing beside his cot for a second one night—that was Robert's belief.

Nurse Eloise intimated that this was possibly a hallucination, offering as conclusive evidence for this conviction the fact that she had not seen this strange M'sieu—this was Nurse's contradictory opinion.

Robert had dictated: "I spoke to Neil, but he did not answer; I think he did not hear me—but it *was* Neil."

Jean sat quietly, her hands crossed in quaint childlike fashion in her lap, while I slowly perused the letter.

"What do you make of that?" she asked when my eyes turned from the letter to the grate fire in contemplative thought.

"In this appendix, which Mam'selle has considerately written upon a separate sheet, not troubling Robert for his signature, she infers that Robert is just possessed of a fancy. People who are ill and confined that way to bed, having so much time for introspection, do take their imaginings very seriously."

"This is not an hallucination, though," Jean said decisively. "Robert has seen Neil. My brother had the least

imagination of any person I ever knew. That was a great drawback in fighting his weakness. I have tried to picture to him the awful consequences, tried to paint the living hell it would bring to him, but it was always as though I spoke a strange language, not one word of it seemed to sink into his consciousness or understanding."

"He may have seen some one—some other person," I contended.

"No one who had ever seen Neil could have mistaken another person for him."

I thought how true this was. Before my eyes flashed a mental picture of Munro's extraordinary head. Strangely enough, it was a Mephistophelean head—strong raven-black hair luxuriantly topped a tapering face of ivory paleness; intense, piercing black eyes, rather small, almost glittering, seemed to stab from under black brows delicately penciled in almost straight lines; the mustache was equally coal black. It was a nervous, sensitive face, carrying always an atmosphere of combat with pain, either mental or physical, perhaps both. I was forced to admit that it was incomprehensible that Robert should be mistaken in Neil, but I said: "Nurse here speaks of some man who occasionally visits the hospital, a M'sieu Mordaunt. She thinks that Robert has seen him, for he answers somewhat the description the boy gave her of the man he saw at his cot-side."

"Yes, that is Neil," Jean answered quietly.

"Impossible!" I ejaculated. "If it were Neil, why didn't he stop when Robert called to him?"

My question threw Jean into a momentary confusion; her calm logical attitude changed to one of trepidation. The sudden look of pain in her eyes reawakened in me the sus-

picion—almost confirmed it to a certainty—that there was an extraordinary something about Neil's going away that both she and Robert had knowledge of, and of which we knew nothing.

Recovering herself, she answered presently: "Neil may not have recognized Robert—he is so changed by his illness. He would be dressed differently, and lying on a cot. Neil would not expect to see him there; the hospital light would be dim."

"But Robert says the man he saw stood by his cot for a second."

"Yes, in passing, Neil may have caught a flitting semblance in some feature that just appealed momentarily to his memory; then, in an instant, as impressions wing their rapid way across our minds, it was gone, and he passed on, not hearing my brother's voice—it would be weak. Perhaps astonished, Robert did not at first open his lips."

"But Robert writes as though this man must have heard him—that's what I gather from his letter."

"Well, if it had been, as you think, a stranger, one Mordaunt, and he had heard Robert's call, he would have gone back. It *was* Neil."

"Well," I said, at the end of a painful silence, "there is but one way to solve this new mystery."

"Yes, just one way," Jean confirmed. "But who is to underta' it—I can't disarrange the lives of my friends?"

"Nonsense, Jean!" I answered. "I'll go to Montreal and find this Mr. Mordaunt—or disabuse Robert's mind of his fancy—or find Neil, if he's there."

"He is. He is there. And I can't express my thanks to you."

"Again, nonsense, Jean. I was itching to run down and have a look at Robert anyway—it will cheer him up, if nothing else comes of it. You mustn't build too much upon my bringing Neil home with me. Don't let so slight a chance give you a hope that would cause you misery if it were proven false."

"It isn't a false hope," Jean answered, with utter conviction. "Robert has seen Neil, and you will bring him back, Doctor; you'll just shut your eyes, and your ears, and your heart, and your lips—you'll just close your very soul, and bring Neil back to me!"

"I will, Jean," I said earnestly, wondering at her vehemence.

But, after all, why should I wonder at anything? Was it not all some terrible, inexplicable mystery, so shrouded in suggestive mysticism that I had almost entertained a dreadful, a horrible suspicion that Neil might have been murdered in the Manse, slain—my God!—in a fit of ungovernable passion by Robert. And even now, at once there was an evil recoil from half-infected optimism; perhaps the boy, through long brooding, was haunted by a visual reincarnation of Neil dead.

"I will go Monday morning," I said, speaking to hush with my voice the flutter of these evil bat wings of thought.

Bain called in the afternoon, and now, uninfluenced by Jean's conviction, I was entirely on the side of Nurse Eloise, claiming that the mission to Montreal was predestined to failure, though necessary to lay by the heels this stalking ghost. Malcolm was not so sure that I was right.

"Do you remember," he asked, "how Mrs. Cameron bowled over the Major's materialistic argument, that if you

couldn't see through a stone wall, ergo there was nothing on the other side of it?"

"You mean the telepathic connection between Twinnies' minds?"

"It's greater than our accepted idea of telepathy," Malcolm contended, "for that radiates from minds in active whirl, their owners awake and thinking with tremendous intensity; but whatever it is that governs the little ones in their sleep, it is far more subtle, for they are not, as it were, active agents, either of them; they are almost in an illimitable Nirvana."

"You are deeper in this even than I, Bain—but how does that effect this question of Neil?"

"Just this way. I have noticed that women—perhaps they must be of extreme sensibility, of impressionable fiber—have a subtle sense that there is no describing, no naming—it is so beyond comprehension in its illusive subtlety that one thinks of it as one thinks of eternity. And I should say that Jean Munro, with her highly developed mentality, has this receptivity, and comes by infallible truths in the most inexplicable manner. As you say, she has the most complete faith in Robert's story that he saw Neil Munro. Her simple sincerity even affected you who had the circumstantial evidence on your side as against this belief."

"You think, then, that I shall find Minister in Montreal?"

"I think *we* shall."

"'We'—are you going, too, Malcolm?"

Bain nodded quite simply.

"I'm glad of that, it will make our search doubly thorough; it's very good of you."

"Not at all—not at all, man; I'm glad to get away for a bit. MacKay and his varnish, and the others of across the way with their bickerings, are a touch tiresome. I'm wanting a little change; and if we happen upon Munro he might listen to me—we were great friends."

"You think, Bain, that for some reason he might not want to come back?"

"Well, he has stayed away, hasn't he? But I'll tell you the truth, Doctor—what I'm thinking—that his reasons are all in his mind." Bain tapped a forefinger on his forehead suggestively. "Munro had a temperament too finely strung to stand the strain of intense unavailing effort, and I suspect the chords just went loose with a snap—overkeyed they were. I'll be with you Monday anyway. In the mean time, here's the errand that brought me. Doctor MacLean is preaching to-morrow, and he's coming out this evening. I wanted to know if you could roof him—I think he'd be quite happy here with the other children, if you wouldn't mind."

It was the softest kind of sunshine, labeled Doctor MacLean, that bustled in through the front door a second after the bus wheels had ceased their rumble at our gate that evening.

"A large package of panacea for the patient," I whispered to the Memsahib, as Doctor MacLean took Jean by the hand, clinging to the tapering fingers to give them a little occasional shake as he rattled on: "My, my! dear me! how well you're looking! You're just your mother over again. I've been so eager to see you all again. I've been wondering how that robin—or was it a sparrow—that we fed, got on."

Then later, when the early winter night had chilled and gloomed the village, we gathered about the ruddy grate—the old boy and the other children, nine of us. Ticked off by numerals—first, the veritable juvenile, Doctor MacLean, so full of quaint humor; then the five minors in the cognizance of the law, the children; seventh and eighth, the Memsahib and myself, youthed to childishness by the leavening influence of all these little ones; and ninth, Jean, strangely full of suppressed excitement over the new hope.

Not for such a group theology or literature, which would assuredly run into egoism, but the discussing of some act of prowess by one of us elders.

In the black-sooted walls of the fireplace a hundred tiny eyes of fire blink at us; they are like meteoric stars in a night sky. I know a storm is brewing for the atmospheric pressure has caused the soot to cling.

The children gather closer to the hearth, their faces bathed in the rose-light of the fire. A mimic battle of imagination soldiers is on. Boers creep from their hiding places in the crevices of the bricks and blaze away at lines of British entrenchments. We see the flash of the guns, running from end to end of the trenches; little bright dots of evanescent fire, quick dying in the background of the black soot. The enemy are driven back and retreat up the chimney, their formation broken; sullenly they give way, firing spasmodically. Presently all is dark—not a rifle spits its venom of red.

"The battle is over," I say.

"Look! here they come again!" shouts Doo-doo.

Once more the battlefield is lighted up by the rolling fire of musketry. And now the artillery! Shells hurtle

through the air; hand grenades are thrown. These are little blurs of soot that drop blazing into the grate.

All down the length of a long brick the attacking force drives the men from their trenches—to the very edge of the Barren Lands—alkali plains, which are gray bricks within the grate-fire zone, guiltless of soot.

The children hold their breath as the struggle waxes fierce. Of course they are all on the side of the British; even Doctor MacLean, man of peace, becomes a partisan of war.

"I'm afraid we've lost the battle," he says; "they've conquered us this time."

Even as he spreads this evil news there is a most furious onslaught by fresh troops upon the Boer flank, their left wing.

"Hurrah!" I cry; "that's the Canadian brigade to the rescue!"

It is a thrilling battle-cry that I have sent forth; the children spring to their feet in eagerness. There are yells of encouragement to the Canadians; alas! there are no encouraging cheers for the Boers, we are patriotically partisan.

Again the British soldiers issue from their trenches, and, attacked front and rear, the Boers give way; the line of battle wavers unsteadily back and forth, always up the chimney now. The slaughter must be terrific.

Fresh Boers pour out from redoubts and swarm down the steep escalade of a hill in rescue of their comrades. The gun-flashes of the contending forces mingle as they fight hand to hand.

It grows so real that Doo-doo shudders; tears come to her eyes when the hill becomes silent in darkness, and I say: "The soldiers are all dead."

A solemn hush follows, and I hear the labored breath of a storm that rushes through the village as though cavalry galloped to a battlefield. There is a swirl of snow brushed against our windowpane by the gale-sweeping broom; it sounds like the twisting of a shroud.

I think Memsahib detects the tears in Doo-doo's eyes, for she says: "I see a castle in the fire, Kippie, and a great blue flower growing out of its turret."

Immediately our interest returns to the grate, where huge ships go sailing over lakes of fire. There is a black giant who eats up little children. Santa Claus is discovered by one of the Twins, carrying a huge pack; in the pack is something for everyone.

For Doctor MacLean it is a horse.

"Dear me!" cries the Doctor deprecatingly; "to be sure —the very thing for an itinerant preacher. But I haven't been on a horse since I was in the Holy Land two years ago, and he was a little donkey."

Sly wag, the Doctor; I expect he also knew of Doo-doo's tears.

"And the donkey's name was Judas, children," he continued. "Dear me! yes; and well named, too, for he dumped me in a pool of mud; less cleansing than the Pool of Siloam, though."

"Sana Tlaus has a sleigh in his pact for Laddie," Kippie says.

"Oh, bully!" cries the boy; "and it's snowing outside. We'll have coasting down Willow Bank hill to-morrow."

Kippie's discovery of the mythical sleigh has given us youth's viewpoint of the harsh storm.

But it is now bedtime for the children. And when they

have gone, swirling up the stairs like a chattering flock of parrakeets, we become elders again, aged to silent retrospect.

As we sit in reverie, each one busy writing on the tablets of his mind, suddenly Doctor MacLean's voice, sonorous and strong, quite unlike the thin fiber of its conversational quality, breaks the stillness with:

"God is in his temple. Let us all keep silence—prostrate bow with——"

The poor old Doctor's voice dies away in a squeak of horror; involuntarily and with great ill-breeding we turn our eyes upon his troubled face. He is speechless for a second, then he says: "Dear me! you must please excuse me. I fell to thinking of my sermon for to-morrow, and I'm afraid—in fact, I *did* speak out. I'm very sorry; dear me—*dear me!*"

The sweet old gentleman is showered with forgiveness—there is nothing to forgive. His simpleness is lovable.

But now the grate fire, ashed to a sullen redness, writes lethargy in shadow-letters upon the hearth, and I say; "Doctor, whenever you are ready to retire—there's a light in your room."

"Dear me! yes, yes! I will go now. When one talks in his sleep it is time to go to bed. So delightful this evening. Dear me—yes, yes! It would be a desolate world with no little children in it, wouldn't it?"

There is a twinge of regret in his voice, perhaps, for he is a bachelor.

Jean follows presently, saying, as she leaves us: "I think this is the sweetest evening of my life. I know something good is going to happen; I feel a strange peace creeping into my heart."

CHAPTER XXII

MONDAY night Malcolm and I took the train from New York to Montreal. The next morning I stepped into an atmosphere of unutterable depression; the huge station, with its myriad of hurrying humans, shrank me to conscious minuteness; I was an ant—a seed from a cotton plant, tossed this way and that on the busy winds of life. Dread obtruded its grim dragon's head, and I felt strangely incompetent. On the street the giant gray-stone wall of the terminal, rising like a cliff, dwarfed me to a pigmy. To the right, St. Peter's Cathedral, holding through the centuries its row of giant apostles, enhanced this feeling of littleness, of insufficiency. Somehow I measured my capacity for the task in hand by the great dome that blurred, round and gray, against a blue winter's sky—emblematic of the immense city we were to search.

I looked curiously at Malcolm, but he marched bravely at my side, his physical force superior to the influences that, like a chilling wind, crept to my marrow. As if my thoughts had thrown him into a materialistic mood, the very antithesis of mine, he said: "Man, but I'm hungry, Doctor!

We'll go to a hotel, have a proper workman's breakfast, and then roll up our sleeves."

"Ah, my leviathan of optimism!" I exclaimed; "it's just such a matter as putting down a carpet—something to be done, eh?"

"Just that. We'll see Robert—the poor lad!—get from him what he knows——"

"You think you'll get that now, Bain—you think Robert will tell what he knows now?"

"I don't. Whatever he kept to himself was because of some promise to his sister."

I started at Bain's words—I had never thought of this.

"How do you know that?" I asked.

"By the most reliable way in the world—observation and a long season of reasoning. Robert was against Neil—he'd keep nothing back on that head. But it doesn't matter, I wasn't thinking of that; I mean we'll find out what there is to be found out about Neil's appearance in the hospital."

"You are confident Neil was there?"

"Quite confident."

"Why?"

"For the same reason that when I have a headache I know I have a headache—I feel it."

"You are like Jean."

"Nobody is like Jean—" This seemed to slip from Malcolm involuntarily, and he added hastily: "Here we are at the place of breakfast."

In an hour we were toiling up the long snow-glazed street that led to Victoria Hospital. By chance we had come on a day that visitors were admitted. We entered a long ward, windowed from both sides, its pink walls mirroring a

rose light, soft and grateful, over a double row of iron cots that held, in snowy sheets, afflicted humans.

At a little desk just within the door sat the head nurse of this ward.

"To see Mr. Craig? Ah, yes; 'the sweet singer,' we call him. You have come from his home?"

And Robert? Ah! I'm sure tears of sympathy and joy mingled close to my eyes as I looked upon his face.

A queer simile came to me, that it was as though I looked upon dross gold that had been passed through fire; something had gone in the burning, something of rude strength, of coarse fiber; but the eyes were clear and tempered like blue-gray steel. And if in the face was resignation, it was a resigning to joy, to happiness.

"Ah!" he cried, breaking the silence in which Bain and I each held a hand, "this is a touch of Heaven to see the old faces; not but that there are sweet faces here"—and he smiled like a boy at Nurse Eloise—"and kind hearts, too."

"You are getting better, Robert?" I asked.

"I'm half well," he answered. "Above the kink in my spine, I'm a fraud to be lying here; below that, I might as well be buried."

The lad was all impatience over the matter of Neil, and he soon launched into this.

"You see," he began, "one night last week a poor chap was brought into the ward—O God! I'll never forget it, never, if I lived a thousand years; it was dreadful! And to think that I might have been like that—when I remember it my affliction seems like a blessing."

"What was it, Robert?" I asked.

"Drink! The man was a raving maniac; he died like that—he was dead in the morning. I think Neil came with that poor fellow."

"But somebody would have known," I argued.

"Not of Munro. But a Mr. Mordaunt was seen, and he is Neil. You will find that Neil is here in the city working among the outcasts—you will find him in the slums."

"But, Robert, why should Munro leave his congregation to labor among strangers—why should he leave his wife and home? It seems impossible!"

"It may seem so, but it isn't," Robert answered decisively; and his eyes, looking straight into mine, talked on in unvoiced words, telling me that behind them was knowledge that I had not.

"I think it is reasonable," Malcolm said, "to suppose that if Neil is in Montreal, it's in these low places we'll find him. It was that spirit of trying to save the lowest grade that took him to India; and as to his being here, away from home, it's just a case of lost memory. That is not so very uncommon."

"Well, the question is, Bain, where shall we look first?"

"Go to the Old Brewery Mission," Robert directed; "I've been asking a few questions from an old wreck of humanity that was here in the ward. The superintendent of the Mission, Mr. Tyler, is the man to help you."

"We'll find Neil," Bain said as we parted from the boy; "and we'll take you both home together, I think."

A smile flitted over the lad's face. "My heart's been thirsting for a sight of the village and Jean. They're kind here, but—'there's no place like home.' I'll not be able to run about again—I'd make a poor goal keeper now, I think.

But if I could just sit there under the maples when the spring comes, and hear the robins calling 'Cheery—cheery—cheery!' it would be just like being in Heaven. I'll get more joy out of life now, even with these unwilling limbs of mine, than I got before when I was strong. I never used to hear the robins nor see them; the flowers might as well have bloomed in Greenland—I was blind to their beauty. The simple things that I remember now and thirst for, as a man craves for water when he is dying of thirst, were to me nothing then, for the drink had dulled my mind so that I craved for nothing but it and excitement."

Bain put his hand on Robert's forehead, saying affectionately: "You're in a good way now, Bob."

It was the first time I had ever heard Malcolm use the abbreviation.

"Yes, poor old MacKillop did me a good turn I wouldn't take back."

"You feel quite safe, Robert—you feel strong over the matter?" Bain asked.

"Quite safe, Malcolm. And I'm quite happy about it."

"Well, I'm going to see the doctor, and if he thinks you'll get on as well at home now, we'll take you as soon as we've found Neil."

At the office we learned that the Brewery Mission was in Craig Street.

As we journeyed there Malcolm was in a communicative mood.

"What's your own idea of all this, Cameron?" he asked. "Do you see the hand of the Lord in it? I'm asking you because you're somewhat on the fence—not as regards your own actions, I mean, but analytically. If I had

put that question to anyone of the church people at home, he'd at once have answered, 'Yes, it's the Lord's hand'; and he'd leave it at that, frowning upon any discussion *pro* and *con*."

"I can't say," I answered. "Robert's misfortune seems so terrible—a cripple for life!"

"And yet if you'd ask him the same question he'd have no doubt at all. He's just thanking the Lord for his deliverance, and he's the real sufferer at that."

"I see; in a worldy way of speaking, if he's satisfied we ought to be."

"Just that. There's too much questioning of the Almighty on other people's account; we're prone to advise them that He is not treating them right."

"This is the number—this is the Mission," I exclaimed, facing, as we stopped, a large window in which hung a curious clock, on its dial the letters of the words "Time" and "Eternity" taking the place of the numerals—"time" in red letters and "eternity" in black.

On the door, large written, was the word "Welcome."

The main entrance was locked, but a smaller door at the side yielded to my hand, and we passed up a stairway to a room in which half a hundred poorly clad men sat at small tables or sauntered aimlessly about. A broad-shouldered, sturdy, strong-faced man came forward to meet us. His stern features relaxed into a gentle look of compliance when I told him we were in trouble and needed his assistance.

"I am here to help people," he said quite simply, and led the way downstairs to his office.

Going, I carried with me a composite picture of all the

faces in that room of temporary refuge. As members of a household living together grow to look alike, so these hunger-brothers of the tribe of Poverty, their features stippled in the gray apathetic despair, were subdued to a commonalty of kinship. The red glow of hope was absent from the drawn cheeks; no jewel of desire for achievement sparkled in the dull eyes; the springs of their physical mechanism were slackened—they were run-down clocks, listlessly quiet.

"Now, gentlemen," said the Superintendent, indicating chairs as we entered his office, "I am Mr. Tyler, at your service—what can I do for you?"

Malcolm explained our errand, and when he had finished I added: "I am afraid you will think it rather extraordinary for us to come looking for a man who is a minister of the Gospel among those who come into your hands."

Tyler opened a drawer of his desk, and lifting out a large package of photographs, selected one, and passed it to me, saying: "That man was the pastor of a large city church—he was an eloquent, cultured, magnetic gentleman."

The photograph I held was that of a human wreck.

"I knew him well," Tyler continued; "it was drink that brought him down—I might almost add that it is *always* drink. If the Devil were bound, chained like Prometheus to a rock, and the bottle still held its sway, God and His Word would yet have the same hard battle to save humanity from itself. Isn't it sad to know that a soulless, devilish, inanimate engine of destruction like alcohol is almost as powerful as He who created worlds, and made man, and gave him a soul, and blessed him with intelligence?"

Tyler threw the photographs into the drawer with a tragic gesture of despair, adding: "They are like a Dooms-

day Book; poor, poor weak humanity! Two in that lot are ministers; and another is of a man who was a leading merchant of Montreal at one time, and now he is an inmate of the Rest at Longue Point, landed there by women and wine; his family are beggars. The man you seek for is not in that lot?" Tyler asked of Malcolm, who had scrutinized each pictured face that was a map of irresponsible weakness.

"No," Bain answered.

"Describe him to me, please."

It was easy to paint in words Munro's unusual face, and when Malcolm had drawn a vivid picture of it, Tyler said: "You have described a man who comes here at irregular intervals. He is indeed an eloquent man; his soul is on fire with zeal, and when he speaks to my poor people, even their indifference falls from them and they come close to him in understanding. I don't know who he is, I know nothing about him. He is the only man who has ever come here that I could never get close to. Of course I knew there was some tragedy in his life—I thought it was drink. I've spoken to him; but he seemed like some timid deer, an approach abrupt, or persistent, might drive him away not to return. I was sure of it, so I just let him come and go as he wished."

"It must be Munro," Malcolm said to me. Then of Tyler he asked: "When do you expect him again?"

"He usually comes on a Sunday. He hasn't visited us for two weeks now, so it's quite likely he may be here first Sabbath—either in the morning or evening."

"We thank you, Mr. Tyler," Bain said; "and here's our hotel address if you should happen to see this man. I think we'll just wait till Sunday."

Walking back to the hotel Malcolm said: "I feel it in my bones that we'll meet in with Neil Sunday. We can look for him in the meantime, and the wait will give me a chance to arrange with Doctor Lupin to take Robert home, if he's agreeable. We'll be mighty proud men going back with the two of them—what do you say, Cameron?"

"You're counting your chickens, Malcolm," I answered.

"I like to do that; I have an idea that sometimes it makes it come about."

For the remainder of the week we were busy, always patroling the streets watching for Neil, or seeing the doctor about Robert. I wanted Bain to employ the detective force to find Munro, but he objected, giving as his reason:

"We'll just go slow, man. If we apply to the detectives it'll all come out in the papers, and the village will ring with it. Man alive! I can hear them in Reid's store telling of our hunt as though we were tracking a bear. We'll just wait till Sunday, and if we can't do any good ourselves, we'll get help from a detective."

So, our spirits hovering between hope and fear, we waited, and Sunday came with us still living on expectation.

At nine o'clock we were at the Mission door. We entered into an atmosphere of coffee. If a London fog were just a steam cloud rising from a Titanic coffee pot, it could not have been more pungently odorous than the large Mission hall, with its row upon row of chairs, each chair possessed of a thin-clad man waiting for his mug of coffee and bread and butter.

We took seats in the back row, Bain whispering: "Man! but it's a charitable atmosphere. Godliness and giving are twins; it's God's whole manner of manifestation. That's

what He is—just godliness and giving; it's the humans I'm thinking that tack many other attributes on to His name. This Tyler is a methodical Christian, which is also good. Poor de'ils, poor de'ils!" Bain added softly, scanning the yellow-gray faces; "their shoulders droop with the load of harassing sin that strikes at their physical bodies, even if they managed to tuck away their souls beyond its sting."

Assistants scurried up and down the aisles with huge coffee pots and great mounds of snowy bread.

I watched the pathetic faces, lengthened by adversity, soften and round out almost to fullness as the generous warmth of the simple fare relaxed the stricture of their pinched stomachs.

"It is good to give, Malcolm," I opined.

"Aye; there's a quick reward in giving to a fellow-creature. I never hankered much for wealth myself, but it would be great business to have means to double the size of this place."

The Reverend Tyler, coming to us at that minute said: "We've dispensed fifty-five gallons of coffee and fifty loaves of bread."

"It's a grand work," commented Malcolm.

"After the serving of the coffee," Tyler said, "we have a service of song and a few words said in the cause. Will you come up to the platform?"

"We'll wait here," Malcolm answered.

"Very well. If the man I spoke of appears, he'll come in at the back entrance; he'll take a seat quietly on the platform, and when I invite him to speak he'll hold them for about ten minutes. After that he always goes back into the eating room, that is, through that door behind the platform,

and has a cup of coffee and bread and butter. That will be your opportunity to meet him."

Then Tyler went up to the platform, took a seat at a small organ, and said in his strong, resonant voice: "Now, men, let's have a good song service for once. Hymn 142—*142*! Let your neighbor look on with you—we're short of books. All sing together now." Tyler's powerful baritone sent the sweet words of the hymn echoing through the packed room, and the men took it up.

"It is Jesus——"

At the end of the first verse Tyler commanded: "Sing it again—better. We're not all singing. Let's have the best song-service we ever had.—That's good! Now for the second verse—*Lift it up!* Now we'll sing No. 90."

One of the assistants repeated the number in French.

After a prayer Mr. Tyler came forward to the small desk at the front of the platform, saying: "Now I am going to read to you a short story that comes very close into your own lives, and I'm going to tell you about it. It's in the sixth chapter of the book of John, the first thirteen verses."

"Now," he continued, when he had read of the loaves and the fishes, "there is something you can understand. There were all those people gathered in that place, and nothing to eat. But the Disciple Andrew found one little lad who had five barley loaves, the size of that"—holding up his fist—"the size of a hot bun—same as your mother made. You remember your mothers, some of you"—the speaker leaned his broad shoulders over the little desk and the great baritone that had echoed through the hall the sweet hymn, now sank low and pleading—"you remember

when you were like this little lad, you were going off on a journey, perhaps fishing or to school, and your mother would fill your pockets with cakes or buns or biscuits. Don't you wish you were there now with that mother that never put in your pocket poison to destroy either your body or your soul?"

My gaze had been riveted on the blue-gray eyes of the earnest speaker; they had really become violet in their intensity.

Suddenly I felt Bain's powerful hand on my wrist, and he whispered, without turning his head: "Heavens! Cameron, yonder is Neil!"

The eating-room door back of the platform stood half open, held by a man who had hesitated on the threshold.

I saw the pale olive face of Neil Munro; his eyes, once like living stars in their brilliancy, now heavy with weariness, rested vacantly upon the sea of faces that fronted him.

"Now I pray God," I heard Tyler say, "that there is some man here this morning who considers his soul of more value than whisky. Do you hear?" he cried, his powerful voice rising till the heavy air of the room vibrated; "just *one* man regenerated to this point is sufficient recompense for all that the Lord has done for you here. Go back, men, to the wives that you've left to starve, and be men again! Go back to the mothers who need your help, and be sons! Go back to the women you married, and the bairns you've brought into the world, and take care of them!"

As Munro slipped quietly to a vacant seat on the platform, Tyler turned his head at a creaking of the chair; then he continued: "Now, men, may God incline your hearts a little to receive the weak words I have spoken. An old

friend of yours has come to offer testimony to God's goodness and love for His creatures."

The Superintendent sat down, and Neil stepped forward to the desk with a tired, listless movement.

"Still working himself to death," Malcolm whispered.

A solemn hush fell over the room; the men charmed to silence by Neil's clear, flutelike voice—soft, cultured, sounding strangely beautiful in its tempered modulation; perhaps this exquisite quality accentuated by comparison with the vigorous rhetoric of the preceding speaker.

"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son," Munro began.

Then he wooed the men, draggled of raiment and soul, with the love of God as told by the lips of Jesus Christ. Munro might have been a lover sent on earth by God to win the hearts and souls of sinners, of men hardened by adversity.

His audience listened as they might have harkened to words from a wise child; a sweet simple message of finding their souls through opening their hearts to Divine love.

Then he went back to Tyler's denunciation of love of the body, saying: "All the warfare with God is because of the body. There are just two things in the world for you to consider—the soul, which is God; and the body, which is the devil. When you want to do right, that is your soul guiding you; when you do wrong—the still spirit within you which is your soul telling you that it is wrong—that is your body with its carnal earthiness. It is one long warfare, with happiness forever and ever the reward of victory. It is hard. I weep with you in your defeat, for I know how hard it is."

Bain whispered in my ear, "It's almost unorthodox, but it's grand sense. It's like Nicholas of Cusa."

"There was a man," Neil continued, "who wanted to carry on this soul work of God's; his spirit was strong but his body was weak. And he sinned against his soul to strengthen the body until the body conquered in sin the soul. That you will understand, for you have done the same thing, many of you. And it leads to nothing but despair——"

"I can't follow him," Malcolm whispered; "it's not clear—is he confused? Poor Neil! I'm afraid he's a doomed man."

"Wait," I answered; "I understand him."

Neil had rested weakly for a second, hesitatingly, as though he groped in his mind or was waiting for strength. Now he spoke again—his voice was firmer.

"The man I spoke of stands before you, brothers; not as a teacher to lead, but just as one of yourselves, a shattered weakling to plead with you to be strong—all for your souls, even to the sacrifice of the body and its desires. There is but one——"

He stopped. I had a fancy that his eyes were fixed upon my face. His hand clutched at the desk and he leaned for a second heavily on his arm; then he added, and his voice wavered, "The peace of God be with you, and the love of Jesus Christ."

He turned away and walked brokenly back through the door.

As he disappeared Tyler rose hurriedly, came to the front of the platform, raised his hands in benediction, and over the bowed heads the simple prayer floated back

to where we sat possessed of an impatience to follow Neil.

As the "Amen" rang sonorously through the hall, Malcolm, clutching me by the arm, cried, "Come, man, quick! we'll find Minister nicely at his breakfast."

We hurried up the aisle, and Tyler, waiting, said: "This way, gentlemen; you'll find him at the corner table by the window."

We passed through the door to a room containing but the two helpers. Neil was not at the window table, nor anywhere within.

In fear we questioned a waiter. The pale-faced man who had spoken had not stopped for his usual breakfast, but had passed by the side door to the street.

"Heavens! Malcolm," I moaned; "have we found Neil and lost him?"

"He's gone, but we've not lost him," practical Bain answered; "he can't get away from us now when we know he's here in the flesh. We were fair stupid though. One of us should have gone out the front and come around to this door."

"I thought of it, Bain, but the front door was locked and I didn't want to disturb the meeting."

We passed to the street and tramped up and down, back and forth, for an hour without discovering a trace of Munro.

"I can't make it out," I said. "I saw him looking our way just as he partly broke down; we were in the dark corner by Tyler's office, but still I'm half inclined to think he recognized me."

"It may have been just that he wasn't feeling very well," Bain suggested; "he looked ill, goodness knows."

"At any rate he's gone again!" I declared. "But seeing him alive has taken a load off my mind. We'll just go back to the hotel and I'll write a letter to the Mem-sahib that we've found Minister at last."

"Yes—that's a grand idea; it wouldn't do to telegraph, in many ways. But we're near the Mission again, and I'm going in to have a little advice from the Reverend Tyler—he's a wise man."

When we told Tyler of our hopeless search, he said: "Indeed, you might look a year for a man in this city and not find him; it's like a rabbit warren w' . its narrow, old-fashioned streets and tumble-down rookeries; and the two nationalities, French and English, jealous of each other, unwilling to give information. Why don't you go to Mr. Carter, the head of the detective force—he'll find your friend for you in a day?"

I told Tyler of our desire for secrecy; but he declared we need have no fear on that head. "Mr. Carter is a friend of mine," he said, "and is one of the finest characters I have ever known. Indeed, you'll be surprised to come upon such a man in that occupation. He has the fine susceptibilities of a woman, though he's a terror to the godless. I'll give you a letter of introduction to him—better still, I'll make an appointment with him for to-morrow at eleven—that's the best time to see him—and I'll go to his office with you."

At eleven o'clock next morning we stood in an ante-room to the detective's private office, having sent in a card.

"Man, I feel like a criminal," Bain expressed, as we looked curiously into a huge glass-fronted cabinet that stood against one wall. It contained a vast assortment of bur-

glar's tools—implements of iniquity, each one labeled with its particular association in crime; murderous slungshots, billies, jimmies, iron drills, fuses, dark lanterns, knives, pistols—an interminable collection.

Half fascinated by their suggestion of human depravity, my soul revolted against the contaminating association of all these depressing things—the depraved fallen ones of the Mission's care, the filthy narrow streets we had traversed yesterday in our search, our appeal to the officer of the law whose occupation was the hunting down of the criminal owners of these lawless tools—with the name of a minister of the gospel, with Neil Munro, pastor of a quiet village where the greatest crime was perhaps a drunken row on the street.

It seemed impossible—it confused my mind. Somehow I thought of Jean Valjean creeping out of the sewer; there it was, similitude, the sweet-hearted little *curé* and Jean who stole his silver candlesticks. How closely the two came together at times, purity and hopeless depravity.

I was roused from this gloomy retrospect by Tyler's voice: "Come, gentlemen, Mr. Carter will see us now."

As the detective rose to greet us, and listening to his quiet even voice, looking into his steady blue eye, clear and placid, I realized again vividly how, shoulder to shoulder, moral worth and vicious sinfulness stood; hand upon arm, and yet separated by illimitable distances. Here was the *curé*, and almost at his elbow the tools of Jean Valjean.

"Just tell me all about the case—as much as you think necessary," he corrected himself, "with a view to accomplishing your errand."

When I ended in shamed apology: "It's perhaps un-

usual to ask you to trace a minister, it is incongruous—it looks so criminal-like."

"You are not the first to come on that errand," he answered. "I mustn't talk, you know, but as those who use slang put it, 'there are others'; and, though it may sound harsh, we'll trail after your friend just as though we searched for a criminal. It's the only way. When laymen can't find a missing man he's generally in hiding, voluntarily, or by force, or dead. I'll give you the best man on the staff, and all doors must open to his knock. He'll find your friend if he's alive and in the city, and you say he is. That is all I can do, gentlemen—it's enough, too, except, of course, as you wish, see that everything is done quite secretly; I can manage that—it's our usual way of working, so it will be quite no trouble. Perhaps Connor may even know just where to put his hand upon your man."

The Chief touched a button on his desk, and a clerk appeared.

"Request Mr. Connor to come here, please," Carter said.

Presently a door opened and a tall handsome young Irishman entered and saluted his Chief.

"Do you remember that minister, Connor?" Carter asked, in a low, even voice.

To me the very quietude of his tone, suggesting something of indifference, as though he inquired for a pair of mislaid boots, compared with our intense anxiety, thrilled me unpleasantly.

And when Connor asked in return, "Which one, sir?" I shivered. Was there indeed no strong broad line of demarcation between the horrible wielders of the slungshot and men consecrated to God's work? Was crim-

inology a huge tentacled devilfish that, reaching out, drew man from the slums or from the pulpit alike. Which minister! which man of sin, under the eye of the detective, labeled "minister"?

"Were there more than one?" Carter asked in this trilogy of irritating questions.

"Yes, sir; I've been observing at least three."

"Well, the man we want is—" Then the Chief described Munro with intense, crisp splashes of word color; it was marvelous how he had condensed our lengthy description of Neil's person.

The young officer turned toward me, and searched me through and through.

The transition in his face was wonderful; the roguish Celtic blue eyes, boyish and frank, hardened, and took on a cunning animal look. I thought the Chief had not noticed this, but his words taught me that I was mistaken.

"It's all right, Connor," he advised; "the missing man is a friend of these two gentlemen; he has disappeared and they are looking for him. They want to take him back to his family; there seems to be something wrong with the poor man."

"I can find him, sir."

"When?" the Chief asked.

"Perhaps to-night; perhaps to-morrow night."

Why at night, I wonde · 1. But Malcolm expressed his anxiety. "Couldn't Mr. Connor be spared to-day?" he said; "we are very anxious and would be willing to pay any charges for time."

"It isn't that," the Chief answered, and his quiet eyes were raised inquiringly to the detective's face.

The latter answered the look, explaining: "I don't know where to look for him in the day."

"Quite so—quite so," remarked the Chief, just as though his assistant had explained everything. "And what hour to-night had these gentlemen better call here for you, Connor? You are at liberty to take your own time, you know, on this case."

"Nine o'clock, sir." He ran his fingers through his brown curly hair, coughed nervously, and twice his lips framed words which remained unuttered.

"Anything else, Connor?" the Chief asked.

"Faith, sir, I'm thinkin' I'd better be askin' for leave off duty for twenty-four hours."

The Chief drew down his brows in a puzzled manner; then they lifted and his face cleared with enlightenment. "I see—yes, it would be as well, Connor." Turning to me, he continued: "He will go with you unofficially; it will be better. You can trust Mr. Connor absolutely."

As we made our way back to the hotel, Malcolm said: "I'm thinking I'm asleep, that it's a dream. It's like something one reads in books and never believes."

"It is just life," I answered. "Presidents come from the log cabin and nobles grovel penniless. You were meaning, Malcolm, it seems impossible to conceive of a man of Munro's character under this cloud."

"Yes, just that. It's impossible to think of Munro as a man to be hunted for with a policeman—there's something uncanny about the business. But we must go through to the bitter end; there's no taking the hand from the plow now. We'll find Neil—yon Irish lad had no humming and hawing about his part of it."

"But why did he say that we must search for Neil at night, Malcolm," I asked, "as though he were some prowler of the dark?"

"I suppose that a detective works better in the dark—like an owl he swoops unseen upon his prey. And, besides, it's very likely that Minister, if he is laboring among these waifs, can also find them better at night."

"Well, we'll soon know," I answered wearily. "But I tell you, Bain, my soul shrivels before a dread something; an evil foreboding thrusts itself into my mind and I can't shake it off."

All that day it was in this mood that we waited for the time of search; questionings and misgivings on my part, and Bain buoying me up with his superior physical resiliency, sending out his optimistic courage to vicariously walk me upon the waters of despond.

There was a visit to Robert; and when we told him what we had done, he said: "Yes, they'll find Neil for you. And you'll just bear with him when he's found, won't you—no matter how it is you'll— What am I saying?" he broke off.

"Of what, Robert?" I queried suspiciously, wondering whether now he wouldn't speak.

But he turned his head wearily away, saying: "Poor Neil! I wonder how God has arranged it for him." Then he changed, to speak of himself, of his going home with us; for Doctor Lupin thought there was nothing to be done now but wait for Time's remedy—and that promising nothing but just the solace of confirmed helplessness—a state of safe invalidism.

It was a little past nine o'clock when we stepped from

police headquarters into a night air that bit at our cheeks with stinging teeth and tingled our nerves with its vibrant crispness. Beneath our feet, swinging into the soldier stride of the detective, the frozen snow sang like struck wires; the stars glittered blue-white in a placid sky, and a stillness reigned over the great city as though men hid from a death angel stalking through its ways.

Following our guide we turned from a wider street through paths that lay crooked and narrow and dark between high embattlements of brick and stone. The dismal gloom of this scarce lighted way thrust me back in memory to the old days of trailing dacoits through Burmese jungles; there was the same oppressive hush as if serpents and sin lurked in hidden places on either side. Perhaps the intensity of my thoughts claimed something of reciprocal action in our guide's mind, for he put his hand detainingly on my arm and said: "That's the worst doorway in the city—they slaughtered a poor chap there last week; it wasn't the first, faith, but, indade, it'll be the last. I think we bagged them this trip. Why a land like this, God's garden—savin', of course, the ould sod—should be overrun with Dagoes, and Chinks, an' Poles is what beats me."

I did not answer as we passed on; my questioning was of the matter in hand. Why were we traversing the habitation of thieves and murderers for a minister of the gospel? Was God asleep—was it all a lie that he took note of the sparrow's fall?

"Easy a minute, sir!" the detective said, tapping lightly with his knuckle on a wooden door, so narrow and darkly let into the blank wall that my eyes failed to outline it.

I heard the complaining creak of a reluctant bolt; a square of dim uncertain light cut the darkness from a panel of the door, and a head was silhouetted framed in this square setting. A harsh voice asked, "Huh! what wantee?"

The Irishman's broad shoulders cut my vision as he put his face close to the opening and answered: "All right, Ying—just want makee look—see."

There was a disapproving grunt—the square trap was closed and I heard a "yah-honk" of rasping Chinese speech within. Then a heavier bolt grated in its sockets and the door swung cautiously open; we slipped within and it was closed again behind us.

My lungs rebelled at the pungent, acrid atmosphere. Again my memory carried me swift to Indian bazaars, with their conglomerate smells of *hookah* pipe, and burning cow dung, and *gnapie*.

Connor tipped his head toward us and whispered: "Don't ask any questions; just put on your holiday face. Them divils is quick as cats."

We were in a basement as respectably furnished as a stable. On my left was a pile of charcoal which nestled against a stove; partitions cut the room into stalls on either side, and in each division was a raised platform like a wide double bunk.

As we went down the center a tall, slim, white man, in shirt sleeves, stood adjusting his tie. At sight of us he turned quickly and busied himself in a corner with his face turned to the wall.

"That's a new duck at the game," Connor whispered; "he's ashamed of being seen. But there's a couple of old

birds," he continued, indicating with a nod a platform upon which two white men reclined. Between them rested a little glass lamp half full of oil in which floated a lighted wick. With a steel needle, one of the men picked a little ball of black sticky substance from the back of a playing card and held it for three seconds in the blaze of the lighted wick; then he rolled and worked it on the stone bowl of a bamboo-stemmed pipe.

"Man alive! what's he up to?" Malcolm asked in a low voice.

"Cookin' the opium," Connor answered. "Faith, he's as handy with the damn stuff as a Chink."

"Opium!" ejaculated Malcolm in an awed whisper; "man alive! are we in an opium shop?"

Suddenly a little gust of wind—somebody had opened a door or a window at the farther end of the room—carried a bitter acrid odor from the sizzling, sputtering bead of opium to my nostrils.

It was like somebody calling to me out of the past. At last I knew what poisonous drug smell I had caught in the manse study—*opium*!

"May I look at one of those pipes?" I asked Connor.

The detective spoke to one of the smokers and he reached his pipe to me. I put it close to my nose, and then knew there could be no doubt—it was the opium smell that had clung to Neil's gloves and his pens and the drawer of the desk from which Robert had taken something to hide from my eyes.

Though I had been in India and had seen the debauched victims of this pernicious drug in hundreds, yet till now I had never known its pestilential breath.

Malcolm looked at me and shuddered. "Put that devil's weapon of destruction out of your hand, man," he said; "let's get out of this—it's like being in hell—we're wasting time; we're out to look for our friend, not to gaze on this unholy work."

"I'm lookin' for your friend," Connor answered quietly; "you must leave it to me."

Bain turned his face to me in perplexity. The dim light showed furrows of care in his forehead and a sigh of impatience escaped him.

"What does he mean?" Bain asked. "We'll not find Neil among these pagans and their victims."

I shook my head.

"Perhaps he's after some one that knows where Neil lives."

I nodded.

Connor had gone on down to the lower end of the room where I could see a door. He spoke to a Chinaman who had accompanied him and the latter, opening the door, they passed through it.

I stood watching curiously the process of preparing the insidious drug. There was a deceitful air of simplicity about the performance that served to accentuate its dreadful, unapparent fatality. The man who cooked and rolled it with loving care was young; but in his eyes—the whites of which were shrouded in blue-gray—and in his manner—deliberate, monotonous—was the solemnity of a thousand years. He fashioned the evil thing till it was like a large black bead on the end of his needle, and as he held it in the blaze again it sputtered viciously with resinous avidity. It was cooked. He forced it into the small hole of the

stone bowl and passed it to his friend, who was lying with his shoulders on a cushion. The latter held the pipe to the lighted wick, put the end of the large bamboo stem to his lips, and drew a dozen draughts of the smoke of oblivion.

"My God! isn't it awful!" Malcolm whispered. "They're fair callous—they're past all shame. I've heard of the effrontery of sin, but this is heathenish!"

"It is dreadful!" I concurred.

In my soul I shed tears of bitterness for the hopeless fate of these galley-slaves. Unbreakable the chain that ate its links into their hearts.

The door at the other end of the room reopened and the detective, coming back, stood at my side.

"Ain't it hell, sir?" he asked, nodding his handsome head toward the smokers.

His attitude—his tall, lithe, sinewy form, topped by the well-set-on head, crying aloud of clean living, radiated by comparison with the pasty-faced smokers, a moral lesson.

"I'd like to speak to that young man," I said; "would it matter—would they object?"

"Don't lecture him; faith, it might kick up a divil of a shindy if you did."

I approached the man who had prepared the pipe. His dull eyes watched me apathetically, much as a sleepy animal's might have.

"May I speak to you about the opium?" I said.

"Yes," he answered.

"How is it sold here?" It was an idle question just born of the intense curiosity that the dramatic situation excited.

"Twenty-five cents a card." His voice was monotonous, unmodulated; he spoke in the tones of a man almost deaf, the dreamy voice of a Lotus Eater.

On the card beside him was a little pitch lake, the size of a coat button.

"How much do you smoke?" I asked, with an apology.

His senses unacute, grasped nothing but the direct query. "Three cards a day," he answered listlessly; "one in the morning, one in the afternoon, and one at night."

"Does it make you forget your troubles?"

"I don't forget my troubles," he answered in the heavy singsong voice.

The deathly perfume of the smoker's pipe hung repulsively in my nostrils as he laid it down with a sigh of weariness. I scanned his waxen face for some sign of exhilaration, for some evidence of that blissful repose that is supposed to be the one brief palliation of eternal damnation. I detected nothing but unutterable emptiness; his face mirrored from his soul just an unmeaning void. Unspeaking, silent he lay, with his eyes fixed upon the lamp, a slight movement of his fingers, as he tapped idly on his thigh, the only evidence of physical existence; his face was a mental blank.

"We'll go, gentlemen—I've done no good here," Connor said, buttoning his warm coat.

As the heavy smoke-blackened door swung inward when we stepped to the narrow street, Malcolm threw his chest out, filling his great lungs. I, too, drank at the clean air as a thirsty horse revels in clear running water.

"Man alive!" cried Bain, "but just a lung full of this heavenly air is better than all the damnable drugs in the

world. Why did you go into yon sink of iniquity, officer?" he asked, with a touch of imperious command in his voice. "Surely to God, man, you didn't expect to find a minister hobnobbing with those heathen?"

"Yes, sir," Connor replied, "there's a minister hits the pipe there the same as any other dope fiend. And, faith, I'm thinking it's the man you're lookin' for, too."

"Oh, it can't be—it can't be! I won't bring myself to believe it, it doesn't stand to reason. A man couldn't—no, no, no! a man with a good wife—a man who had been brought up a Christian—himself a servant of the Lord—couldn't sink so low."

The big Scotchman's anguish was pathetic. I knew as well as though he had said it, that by strong words he was striving to rebuke the doubts that were in his own mind.

"Faith, he's not there now anyway," Connor said; "but it's early."

"What did the Chinaman say—did you ask him?" I queried.

The detective gave a little sniff of amusement.

"I did not; that would have blown the gaff. Them Chinks have 'the wireless' beat to a standstill. How they work it, it's meself don't know, but if you let the cat out of the bag in one of their dives as to what your game is they're onto you in all Chinatown. Sure, Ying was all smiles, but that's the heathen Chinee for you. They're not our friends—they're the friends of the men that buy the dope; and if I let him know who we were after we'd never catch sight of him."

"What shall we do now?" I asked.

"We'll take a look at some of the other places, and come back later on. It's here that the man we're lookin' for hits the pipe."

We visited half a dozen places similar to Ying's. Caverns of Inferno, peopled, as was his, by slaves of the poppy-blood. I walked in a dream through a maze of narrow streets, our leader sometimes volunteering their names—Vitre, La Gauchitiere, Bleury—uncanny names. I grew tired, depressed. We searched for a man with a prayer in our hearts that we might not find him—not find him in the Satanic haunts to which our guide led us.

"We'll take a peep into some of the chop suey houses," the detective said at last; "our man might be havin' something to eat."

The chop suey places were all alike. Up creaking stairs we climbed and passed through narrow halls off which opened eating rooms that were like large boxes. Sometimes these were occupied, and the eaters of chop suey eyed us curiously, often with apprehension.

Once Connor checked as we trailed in Indian file through a hallway, saying: "Faith, there's Ba'tiste, I'll ask him. He's the divil on wheels entirely. He's a runner for a sailor's boarding house. Sometimes he runs with the thieves, and sometimes with us."

Through the half-open door of a room I saw a small, dark man, whose face, sharp-nosed as a weasel's, had been pitted by smallpox till it was like yellow, pebbled Morocco. Across the table from him sat a frayed female, who somehow conveyed the impression of a rich child's doll that had fallen in the gutter and lain there for days. Lace and

flamboyant red ribbons nestled incongruously in her hat, on her breast—seemingly everywhere.

"Sit aisy, Ba'tiste," Connor commanded, his white teeth showing in a smile as he shoved the door wide.

"By Gar! Brian, dat's de big fright you give me. *Sacre*! I'm 'fraid for de damn p'lice."

His thin lips tightened into a snarl that must have been intended for a smile, for his companion gave a short, nervous chuckle.

"Do you know the Sky Pilot, Ba'tiste——?"

"De Protestant *curé* dat pray at de Fo'castle for de sailor?"

Again the evil pock-marked face was twisted by the smile-snarl.

"Yes. Have you seen him lately—to-night?"

"What you want, eh—damn p'liceman?"

"Aisy, Ba'tiste—nothin' doin'."

"Say, Brian—" the small, narrow-slitted, animal eyes in the dark face were suspicious—"If dere's not'ing doin', w'at th' hell you mak' de round for, eh?—jus' *passer le temps*?"

"Don't get on yer ear, Ba'tiste—perhaps you forget the time the two Greeks were ticklin' your ribs with cold steel."

I saw the evil face of the runner relax its vicious cunning, and the dark yellow skin grew mahogany red as though warm blood chased beneath its shell.

"*Non, non.* Brian, you damn Irish! *Voilà*, you save me dat tam'. *Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, pardonnez*—I forget—By hell! I forget. Yes, spik de trut'—is it frien' for *le Curé*? He save my life, too—he nurse me." Ba'tiste said

something in French to his companion, who raised her hands in an inimitable expression of pious adoration. "See," Ba'tiste continued in English, "Franchette say he is de good man."

"These are his friends," Connor continued; "they want to find him."

Baptiste scanned our faces narrowly. It was difficult for him to disabuse his mind of the idea that when the police searched for anyone, aught but trouble was behind the searching. With a shrug of the shoulders he turned from his sharp scrutiny of our faces to ask—"Irish, what you want wit' *le Curé*—you want shanghai him for some damn landlubber Bethel? What you want? Make de sign of de cross, Irish, an' speak de trut'. I know where is M'sieu *le Curé*, but I'll see de whole damn p'lice force in hell 'fore I tell if you goin' make trouble for dat poor man. He's a Christian."

"If it is the minister we're looking for," I interposed, "we want to take him home to his family; we are his friends."

"He's not done not'ing wrong—*Mon Dieu*! why I ask, he can't do not'ing wrong, he's Christian. *Très bien! allez* —come wit' me."

The runner's invitation was comprehensive; it included the gaudy red-ribboned lady of the feast.

Behind these two we walked through more narrow streets, the sidewalks of which were like furrows plowed in white ice; they were gutters from which at times we climbed over mounds of frozen snow, following our guide who disdained crossings, and, as I fancied, traveled by the instinct of direction. We never came into the broader ways,

and the monotony of these paths between silent gloomed walls caused me to wonder if all the streets of the city had suddenly shrunken to the width of alleys.

At last Ba'tiste stopped at a little building that claimed as approach some snow-covered steps that, unshoveled, were round and slippery. He whispered to his companion, and she tapped lightly an iron knocker that sent a harsh tattoo echoing through the house.

"Dis is my mudder's house," Ba'tiste said, "an' M'sieu *le Curé* is lodge here. But he won't lodge nowhere pretty soon. By Gar! he is soon sign pepers for de long voyage. *Mon Dieu!* if all Protestant is goin' to Hell den M'sieu *le Curé* is damned for sure, but if some Protestant is get to Heaven, by Gar! he is de firs' to get de chance— Ah, *entrez*, M'sieurs. Come, Irish."

As we entered, a small, bent, little old woman, holding a lamp in her thin hands, eyed us suspiciously. Ba'tiste said something in French, and she gave him the light, leaving us by a door that opened off the hall, and Ba'tiste, bidding us follow, led the way up a winding stairway to an upper room.

With his hand on the door he whispered, "M'sieu *le Curé* is seek; I will firs' knock to see if he sleep."

Ba'tiste knocked gently, but there was no answer; he knocked again and there was no response.

Perhaps it was all the nervous tension that had unstrung me; a chilling dread crept into my heart—what if that now we had found Neil we should find but the frail tenement that had clutched brokenly at the desk of the Mission—just the tenement, and the other that was Neil gone forever! It would be like another step in this

deepening tragedy; this mystery that never lifted from out the deeper shadows.

I could hear Malcolm breathe heavily in the suspense of waiting.

Ba'tiste spread the expressive fingers of his hand in a silent command for us to remain, and, turning the lock, he swung the door and passed into the room, only to reappear in the doorway and motion us to enter. He held the lamp above a small cot, and its sickly yellow rays fell upon the cold, drawn face of Neil Munro.

At first I thought he was dead; the eyes were closed, the face itself gleamed yellow-white like wax.

I saw Malcolm's hand upon Munro's breast, feeling his heart.

"Is he dead?" I whispered.

Bain shook his head. "No, he's not dead, poor Neil! but he's in a bad way," he said presently.

"What is it?" I asked—"what's the matter with him?"

"Been hittin' the pipe too much," the detective said, and his answer sounded brutal.

"*Non, non*," objected Ba'tiste; "yes, p'rhaps hit de pipe leetle, but he work too much, an' don't eat plenty. He's seek, he's weak. You know hes name?" Ba'tiste continued, his small intense eyes fixed on my face questioningly.

I nodded.

"By Gar! he don't heself. He don't know not'ing—he's lost; just work for *le bon Dieu*—can't find out not'ing from him; hes frien' he don't know."

"We must take him to the hospital," Malcolm said;

"he seems to be in a sort of deep stupor, or sleep—I don't know what it is."

"It's the opium, sir," Connor volunteered; "I've seen 'em like that before. They get dopey."

It was a curious form of limited reasoning the young Irishman had; the apparent subverting everything else of deduction.

"Can you get a sleigh, Ba'tiste?" the policeman asked.

"Yes, do," I added; "I'll pay you for your trouble."

While Ba'tiste was gone for the sleigh we tried to rouse Neil to consciousness; we chafed his hands, and Malcolm held his big warm palm close-pressed over the sluggish heart. Something of the terrific life force that was in Bain pulsated into the somnolent man, he sighed wearily once or twice, and half turned his head.

When the sleigh had come, Malcolm took the Minister's thin form in his arms as though he had been a babe and carried him, still wrapped in the bed blankets, down the complaining stairs, and in the sleigh we hurried to the hospital where Robert lay.

"Collapse," the Doctor said; grim, comprehensive, emphatic word, dealing directly with result, not troubling with cause, or why or when. And after a little he added, "There's no immediate danger; but the man is a wreck. I should say he was doomed. Opium, overwork, insufficient nutrition—just one of those terrible fierce-working mentalities that burns up its encasement."

We went back to our hotel, Malcolm and I, and a big cathedral clock perched somewhere on the great shoulders of the broad city echoed back to the stars with metal tongue, hour after hour, the spaces of night time they chronicled in

their silent transverse of the dial of the universe, as we two friends of the man of collapse sat sleepless and talked in hushed voice.

Here was Jean's ship, battered, a derelict, found but to be towed into port—and how? What was now to do? And having found Neil, were it not better that we had come upon the memory of a man dead?

And the silent voices of thought read to us, solved, the riddle of the many months' mystery. The tears of despair that oozed from the flagrant-hued poppy, silent lurking devils of infamy, had caused Neil to disappear. And Jean must have known. Shielding Neil's name this thing she had hidden in her heart, with no word of upbraiding for the absent one, even rather reproaching God for His want of sustaining care. And Robert too had known. In all his blatant drunkenness he had remained silent on this point. I cursed myself for my hideous suspicions of the boy.

And now actuality and knowledge only brought closer the edge of a dark future. Better a thousand times that Neil should die than go back, like a son of Ahab, to sit in the shadow of God's tabernacle, and in the light of his wife's regard, a bondman to this hideous devil-god that was worse than Baal.

The wintery dawn grayed our frosted window with its limning of ice ferns as we still sat chained to the rock of sleeplessness by these links of bitter memory and hopeless anticipation. There seemed something so heinous in the power of trifles for evil.

God, wise, omnipotent, creative; and beneath the spread of his hand a woman of glorious quality and a man of God,

his soul afire in holiness; a flaunting red-flushed flower—a scratch upon its pod, and oozing drops of devil's blood, just trickling tears of iniquity that drags these lives into a maelstrom of misery and sin and death.

Why should the countless stars through all eternity hold true in their ordainment, and the sun and the moon, to the welfare and the glory of him created in God's image, when this one small black drop of desolation could change the hope of God, man, into a hopeless creature of the Devil?

Thus we who sorrowed had marveled and despaired—had tabulated nebulously these sensations of the mind; sometimes in words, and sometimes but transient clouds and rays of light scurrying across the plain of our understanding.

From neither of us came a word of reproach for the author of the misery—and was he even the author? Unexpressed we both felt this; *through* him it passed, the misery.

But for Jean, bearer of a gift from God, we must take thought; and if the truth were helpful we would be glad bearers of the truth; but if solace lay in lies, then fearlessly, resolutely, I for one would lie, saying that at last Neil was found, and being sick would soon be well again.

Perhaps I spoke something of this to Malcolm, for I heard him saying: "We must tell Jean that Neil met with an accident, but will soon be back to the pulpit. I'm thinking that when she has her little bairnie dabbing at her cheeks with his chubby fist she'll stand to be told whatever there is to tell; for when Jean is just herself, a Craig, she has rare pluck—a strong heart. We'll talk it over together, Cameron, when we come by whatever the Doctor

knows, and we'll fix it up to tide the poor girl over her hour of trial."

"Yes," I answered, "and the first act in this necessary programme is a letter home written on rose-colored paper with the lines all running uphill, which indicates cheerful hope, optimism."

For three days Neil wandered in the borderland that lies half in the Shadow of the Valley of Death. It was wonderful to me that the machinery of human structure could run so silently, so close to the edge of cessation, and yet not stop. It was like a clock that, inaudible in its escapement, still carries its pendulum over the dead-center.

On the fourth day the pendulum just whispered—Neil's heart beat stronger, and the Doctor, who had answered our queries in a negation of silence, now said: "The patient, with care, will live for a time; how long I cannot say. He is just worn out. More opium will kill him, and without it he will die."

"The opium will surely kill him, Doctor?" I queried.

"Yes, he is half atrophied now. But if he had not used it, as he has lived, burning up his life force without sufficient rest and nutriment, he would have died of collapse or pneumonia before this. This slow poison has enabled his system to repulse the other agents of disease, the small eaters-up of life."

"But does no one ever recover if they give up the opium?" I asked.

"Few ever give it up, and when they do they generally die. There have been cases of dearly bought victory—such as De Quincy's—but our patient has not the stamina, I think. In India in the jails the officials recognize the fact

that the confirmed opium users lean their lives upon this devil-shadow, and they are allowed a daily portion of the drug. I have deemed it necessary to give this man a little since he has come to the hospital—he would have died otherwise."

"How long do you think he might possibly live if he succeeded in breaking off the habit—took no opium?" I asked.

"My answer to that must be almost a guess. He might die within a month, he might live even two or three years, with tender care. He's like a man with an incurable disease; the works will gradually run slower and slower until they stop."

Another two days and Neil was able to converse with us. At first he recognized Malcolm and myself dimly; our faces were like faces that appeared to him in a dream. Gradually his true condition became known to us. He had forgotten many things. Strangely enough, periods in his existence deeper down in the annals of the past were more vivid than incidents of later time. It was as though he had come out of India a month ago; and yet to him it was a thousand years since he labored in the Lord's vineyard there. The church at Iona meant just a tabernacle of God standing in the world; the trials, the hopes, and the fears had obliterated themselves, and he spoke of having labored unavailingly, vainly, that he had been a weak vessel shattered by the strength of predominant sin.

We had hesitated fearfully at first to speak of Jean; a foreboding of something held the name unuttered on our lips. He was like a child to be led into the paths of memory by the sight of familiar signs.

It was Malcolm who said at last: "Jean is waiting at home for you, Neil, and when you are stronger we are to take you back to your wife."

For a day the words "Jean," and "wife," and "home" came and went fitfully in his mind, sometimes finding momentary life on his lips.

Of his going away from Iona, of his coming to Montreal, of the life there, all was a blank; it was something sealed and in the keeping of another. The slow tortuous unraveling of the frayed ends of the past, the smoothing out of the wrinkled intellect, was a soul-trying, almost hopeless, endeavor.

Neil's faint grasp of reality grew stronger so imperceptibly that we scarce noticed it. But at last he began to understand, though as yet weakly. Our faces gradually found their counterpart registered in the long ago of his mind; the words Jean and home and the others beat at the barriers of forgetfulness, shattering the walls of oblivion, until they entered deeper into the citadel of his understanding, and he talked of all these things, the dearest on earth, in the monotonous voice of a man who discusses the trivial commonplaces of life.

"This state will pass," the Doctor said; "time will brush the cobwebs away. His mentality will clear."

"And after that—" I asked, "what?"

"He will die. His mental force is the stronger; undrugged it will work smoothly, but the shattered machinery of his physical force will stop."

"And of the drug," I asked—"the fearful opium?"

"He is getting none of it now; something else? yes. And when he is a little stronger he must decide for him-

self—opium and a little longer of life, with a death in sin, or no opium, and perhaps to leave a little sooner."

There came the day we were to take Neil back to the village, for it now rested altogether with himself and God. His mind had grown almost strong; he could walk feebly, like a child.

And Robert was going, too, a helpless cripple, to be carried.

Neil was in a private ward, and we were allowed to be with him at will. It was the night before the homegoing that Munro told Malcolm and me of the coming of his shame, of drifting into the land of the Lotus Eaters. It was a sad, bitter tale of unsought sin.

In India it had begun, this carrying of the yoke of damnation. A famine had come to the district in which Neil labored, and he had worked night and day to save not only the souls, but the bodies of his people. He had overtaxed his strength a thousandfold, living on his will when his body was starved by insufficient food and his blood scorched by the fierce heat.

A faithful servant, Rammia, had given him—without his knowing it at first—the black essence of sustainment, and when he did come to know the price of his own sacrifice, it seemed nothing if he accomplished good for his people; if he could save them body and soul.

Neil told the sad story without abhorrence. That it had wrecked his life seemed to carry nothing of remorse. It was a curious phase of Christianity, and yet that is what it was, Christianity; not out of physical desire, but just for a little sustaining to carry on the work of his Master.

But when Neil left India he had given up the drug.

He told us of the horrible fight he had made to conquer, and he had conquered. He only thought he had really, for when brought weak again by overwork and mental strain in the village, the Devil, who had been waiting, held to his soul the allurement of false strength, and he fell.

Then Robert had discovered Neil's secret sin. There had been a torrent of recrimination from the boy, smarting under Neil's monitorship over his weakness. Neil, hovering on the brink of physical collapse, struck by the tragic awfulness of his position, was hurled into an abyss of mental darkness. He had wandered forth in the early morning, following an impulse to flee from his shame, and, from that time until lifted into reason in the hospital, he had wandered in a dim cavern of forgetfulness, his intellect working like a clock with the present, the past almost a dead thing of the past. It was something akin to instinct that had held him in the field of his life's work, the service of God.

Neil himself explained it very simply as the guidance of God, but to me it held an unfathomable depth of psychology, even of physiology.

Such phases of the mystery as this would never be solved, I knew; but, how simple the unraveling of the mystifying actualities, Neil's disappearance and its cause, now was. How simple, and yet how terrible, the shadow of despair and inevitable death thrown ineffaceably across Neil's life and Jean's.

And now Robert, the secret he had carried locked in his heart known to us, admitted that Jean had also known. He had gone to Jean with the horrible story, and she had made him swear never to divulge it; that was why his

lips had been sealed. It was an opium pipe he had thrust in his pocket from the drawer, and fearing that I, who had been in India, might discover the telltale odor of opium, he had gone back to the study and destroyed every taint. Even the jade-handled knife had carried on its sharp point the sickly smell, for Neil must have used it to cut the opium into little pellets.

It seemed a lifetime that we had been away when we once more, creeping through the evening shadows, came to the Hedge. No one in the village knew we were coming except the Memsahib and Jean.

It was a crowded hallway that we pushed into. Malcolm carrying Robert in his arms from the bus. It was like a flower stall, five little rose bushes that dodged about, or stood against the wall to make room, and the curious white weed, crazy with delight, that whined and leaped against my legs.

For me there was a clasp of warm arms; and for Neil the Memsahib's hand that led him to the big armchair by the grate.

On the sofa, gently laid by Malcolm, Robert was soon quite hidden by the rose bushes that transplanted themselves into a hedge at his side.

I knew that Jean was in her room, for the Memsahib's letters had prepared me for this.

Presently the bustle of our coming died to a little hush, and suddenly a small wavering fretful voice—the voice of a babe, came in a tiny treble down the stairway, and rang in our ears like the sweet music of silver bells.

I saw Malcolm start and his big solemn eyes grew soft and luminous.

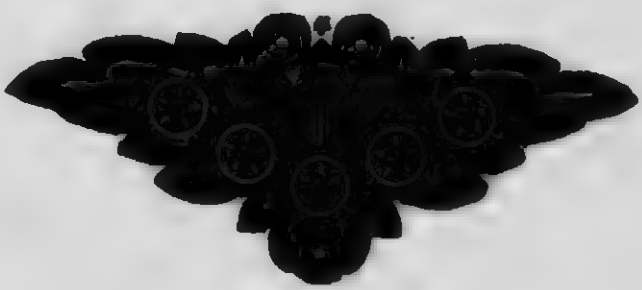
Something of thankfulness surged from my heart and crept its choking way upward, and my voice was thick as, putting my hand in Munro's, I said: "Neil, that's the voice of your child."

His lip trembled as he essayed to speak. Tears coursed down his pale cheeks; he rose to his feet, and going over to where the Memsahib sat, kissed her on the forehead.

The Memsahib took Munro's hand, saying: "God has been good to Jean, Neil; you can go up to see her and the boy presently—when the first joy of your coming has quieted a little."

Then she led Munro back to the chair. He raised his tired eyes upward and said solemnly: "Thank God for all His goodness, and His mercy to me, a poor, repentant sinner!"

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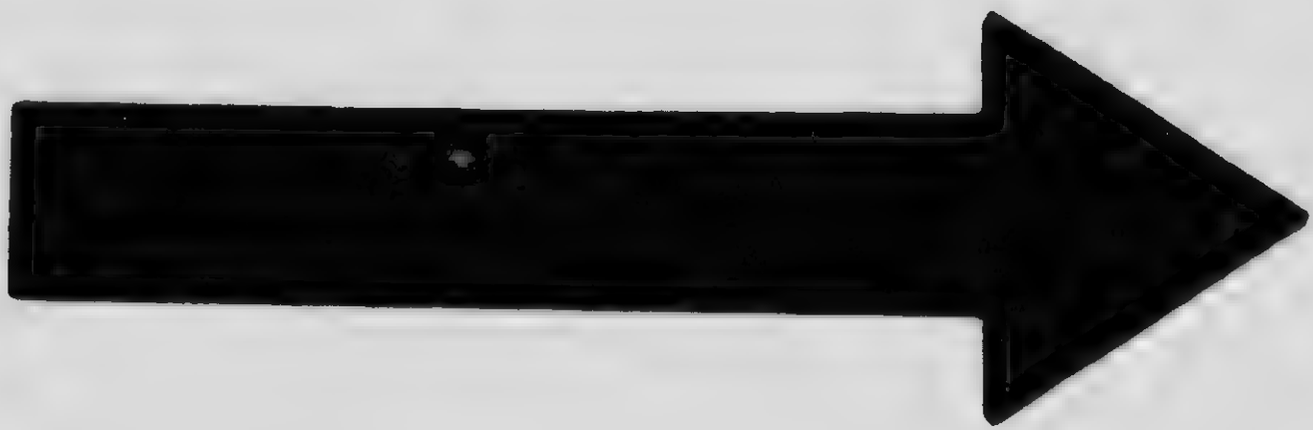
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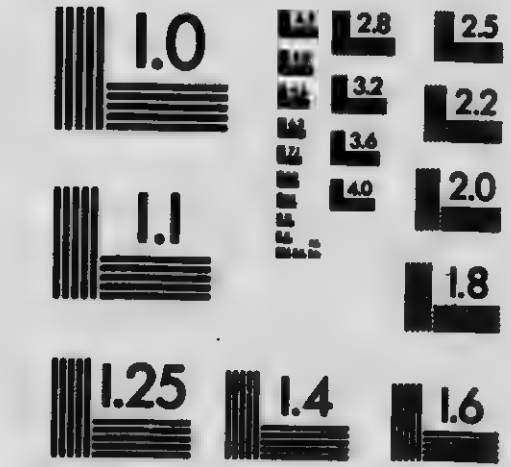
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